

Title: Harry Potter and the Second Life

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Rating: R/FR18

Disclaimer: Captain Fangirlhumper... err, J.K. Rowling owns the Harry Potter universe. Wish they were mine so I could do utterly retarded things to them and watch my bank account get steadily larger, but sadly not mine. There are a handful of my OCs inserted here and there for flavor, since despite being Scottish, JKR evidently forgot they and the Welsh would probably be members of the student body. If you like them and want to use them, please ask first.

Summary: Wishing upon a falling star, 17-year-old Harry ends up in the body of his 10-year-old self, in a world where nothing is quite the same. How will he handle being a 'normal' boy in an unknown world?

Joe's Note: This originally started as yet another rewrite of SilverAegis's infamous, oft abandoned Harry Potter and the New Life. And why is it abandoned so much? The pure amount of shit I had to excise to make a functional story out of the mess he'd published was mind-boggling. Between that and the openly homophobic comments previously posted on his profile, I decided to further distance myself from the creep and his poor writing. But I'm not giving up my story just because he decided to become narrow-minded. So screw his poor grammar and storytelling, screw the shitty anime worship - mostly Ranma, but there's a smatter of other references in the original including multiple times when the genius actually put 'if this was an anime then' - and screw him. It took me five versions of Chapter Seventeen to conclude it was time for a reboot and this is the third complete revision. Think it was worth it. Hope you do too.

Sharp little clicks of high heels sounded against the polished wood floors of the heads' common room, but Harry Potter elected not to look up from what he was working on. She stopped in front of him and he could practically picture her, bushy brown hair more frazzled than usual, the two spots of color high on her cheeks, arms crossed over her chest as she glared at him. Hermione Granger was a creature of habit, after all. "Harry James Potter!"

"That was my name last time I checked, yes." Harry continued to ignore her presence, muggle fountain pen scratching softly against the page of his enchanted journal as he wrote. He'd come to realize long ago that - despite her use of mental abuse instead of physical -

Hermione was shockingly like his cousin Dudley insofar as both thrived on bullying the people around them into submission. And the only real way to get rid of a bully, apart from using a curse that would probably land him in front of the Wizengamot, was to ignore them. Eventually they would get bored and move on. Hermione hadn't yet but he no longer indulged her; their discussions had reached a repetitive state months ago and while she never seemed to tire of trying to have the same argument yet one more time, he most certainly had. "Can I help you with something, Hermione?"

Grabbing the top of his journal, Hermione tipped it down so she could actually meet his eyes. "Yes. You're going to go get dressed and then we're going to put in an appearance at a party in the Gryffindor common room. And you're going to have fun at that party even if I have to hit you with a Cheering Charm. Now get moving."

Harry took advantage of their locked eyes, forcing his way into her mind with legilimency and rooting around until she realized what was happening and jerked her gaze away. Snorting, Harry batted her hand away from his journal and raised it again as he went back to transcribing something he'd pulled from Voldemort's mind in their final battle. "I don't think so, but you have fun with that. Assuming you stay more than five minutes before dragging Ron off somewhere private. By the way, tell Ginny that I'm neither flattered nor interested. Her obsession with being 'the wife of He-Who-Defeated-Voldemort' crossed the line between disturbing and truly frightening a long, long time ago." He snorted. "Girls like her are almost enough to make me wish Colin hadn't died."

The blood drained from Hermione's face and her mouth worked soundlessly for a few moments before she scowled and whirled around, stomping back towards her room. Oh, what a horrible person he was, not wanting to waste time being deafened at a gathering of people he barely knew while letting the harpy shove him at a ginger barnacle who was under the deluded notion that they 'belonged together'. Harry snorted before returning to his work. Why were they even having a party, come to think of it? Quidditch season was over for the year. Maybe someone's birthday party, run amok? Or just a party for the sake of a party? The Gryffindors did seem to enjoy doing that these days and... well, the professors lacked the will to rein in the student body as a whole, writing off the mass misbehavior as a coping mechanism for dealing with the death and

destruction they'd witnessed when Voldemort marched on Hogwarts in February of that year.

While he'd lost others over the years... Cedric, Sirius, Dumbledore, and a few members of the Order in small battles here and there... that one fight had done almost as much damage to his life and happiness as his second Halloween. Many people had died in the final battle, including his last surviving link to his parents: Remus Lupin. Tonks had perished alongside her new husband that day, and he'd lost several other friends as well: Neville Longbottom, his fiancé Hannah Abbott, Daphne Greengrass, Colin Creevey, and George Weasley among them. But as selfish as it made him feel, all of them combined paled in the face of one other loss he'd suffered that day. Luna Lovegood had been killed by Voldemort himself, mere hours after Harry had proposed to her and she'd accepted. A day dedicated to love, a day when they'd celebrated their love by taking the first steps in forging a life together... brought to an end by those two hated words.

Only a sick fuck like Voldemort would have attacked on Valentine's Day, Harry mused. Valentine's Day. Heh. He was lucky it was still known as such. He'd actually had to fight the Ministry to keep them from renaming it Harry Potter Day. Then they'd wanted to rename Halloween in his honor. Finally, when they targeted July 31st, he'd just given up. They could turn his birthday into a festival. It wasn't like he had anything better to do on that day anymore, what with all his loved ones being dead and all.

That was the other reason, apart from the loss of people close to him, behind his withdrawal from the world around him. His popularity pushed in on him from all sides now, everyone wanting something from the famous He-Who-Defeated-Voldemort. Offers of false friendship, business arrangements, political alliances, courtship... more than a few witches in his age group - and a few whose age ranged out into his parents' class at Hogwarts and beyond - had even made outright sexual advances, wanting nothing more than to be able to brag about being a notch on their savior's bedpost. It was all quite disturbing in his opinion. Well, it would have been disturbing enough to begin with, but having it happen so soon after the death of the woman he loved just made it all the worse.

Ron hadn't taken it too well, either. While their friendship had been on rocky ground since the redhead and Hermione had started dating,

it had deteriorated and collapsed completely in the aftermath of Voldemort's demise. Ron had decided he was no longer content to be Harry Potter's Sidekick and, even though he was recognized for his role in the war, he'd wanted a share of Harry's fame too... fame he had not one iota of claim to. And it'd eaten at him, until the day he finally gave in and walked away from Harry.

Even Hermione was different in this strange new world of his. She'd gone from a slightly bossy yet caring combination of sister and mother to a hideously obnoxious harpy, obsessed with the idea of returning him to 'normal'. What was normal for him? He'd been a beaten, starved, and overworked slave for people who'd hated him since he could walk. At eleven, he'd learned he was a wizard and part of a secret society - and a celebrity in that society at that - and then the last seven years had been spent fighting Voldemort in one form or another while being alternately canonized and vilified by a society of sheep. What normal did he know, that he could return to now that Voldemort was gone?

And hell, what did Hermione know about normal? She was a socially retarded bookworm whose only contact with people came through her boyfriend's family and the people who orbited around Harry... and who he was pretty sure had some degree of nymphomania, given the frequency and duration of Ron's visits to the Head Girl's room. Head Girl duties, pleasure reading, and even her precious homework had started to fall by the wayside as of late and Harry knew that if they weren't only three weeks from NEWTs and graduation, McGonagall and Flitwick would be stepping in to address the matter.

Harry snorted; hopefully prophylactics were on the NEWTs, because that was about the only thing related to charms or potions Hermione had worked on outside the classroom since... pretty much February.

He knew that at least for him, though, NEWTs would be no problem. He'd been trained by the best of the best to defeat Voldemort, and his knowledge in every one of his classes was post-NEWT at a minimum. These days, his DADA, charms, and transfiguration knowledge was starting to reach out into the realm of 'only half a dozen people alive know some of the spells' territory. No, he dared say passing his NEWTs would be no problem at all. Which was good, because that gave him time for extracurricular things like

being Heady Boy and Quidditch Captain, which in turn took his mind off his life.

After a few refreshingly quiet minutes, Hermione came back out of the Head Girl's room and slammed the door behind her, making Harry look up from what he was doing. Her attire garnered a raised eyebrow from him; before the second semester of this year, he hadn't been aware Hermione knew skirts that short existed, much less owned them. He stared pointedly at her bare thigh for a moment before sliding his gaze up to meet her eyes and she flushed slightly. "Ron likes it when I dress like this. Now go get ready. We're leaving in three minutes. And if you really don't want to spend time with Ginny, fine. There's always Lavender, Parvati, Romilda, Jen, Chloe..."

"Don't want a disease, is a ditz, scares me more than Ginny, can't even manage to say hello to me, don't even know who she is... thanks but no thanks, Hermione. No. Non. Nyet. Nein. Næi. It was nice no-ing you. Have I made myself perfectly clear yet, or would you like me to start branching out into some of the really odd languages I learned while training? Mermish? Gobbledegook?" Hermione crossed her arms over her chest and started tapping her foot, causing Harry to roll his eyes. "You're not going to win this, Hermione. I'm not going to the party, much less making a pass at some girl. Unlike you, I actually take care of my head duties. And I'm not talking about what Ron asks you to do in every dark corner of the school he can manage to drag you into."

Hermione blush became even more pronounced at the reminder of Harry's seemingly uncanny ability to walk in on her and Ron in compromising positions around the school. Not that he had any desire to, but when they took to using the entire school as their personal sexual playground... well, he couldn't very well avoid every lockable room in the school out of fear he'd walk in on them. He'd used the Marauder's Map near the beginning of the year to aid in his patrolling but that'd taken all the fun out of it after a while. Now, walking in on his former best friends was the price he had to pay for the rest of each evening's entertainment.

It was generally worth it. Well, except for that time with Ron, a drunk Hermione, and an equally inebriated Pansy Parkinson. It was going to him take years of therapy or quite possibly some fun spell time

with Gilderoy Lockhart for him to ever get over walking in on that one.

"Harry." Oh Merlin, the harpy was whining at him again. Did she ever shut up? "I'm worried about you. You've been so different since you defeated Voldemort. You don't talk to anyone, you don't do anything fun..." Hermione sat on the arm of his chair, putting her hand over his. "This isn't what she would have wanted for you, Harry."

White-hot fury burned through Harry's veins, so violent that he momentarily feared that Voldemort was back and emotions were leaking through his scar again. Then he realized that his occlumency barriers were still at full strength and it was his own rage at Hermione. "Luna has been dead for three months, Hermione. Three months. I loved her. We had just gotten engaged that very day, and Voldemort tore her apart in front of me for his own sick amusement. And then I destroyed him in revenge. But when I was done with that... Luna was still gone. So no, Hermione, don't try and tell me what Luna would have wanted. As if she wasn't someone you hated spending time with. As if you didn't just tolerate her because I made you. As if you somehow have some insight into what actually went on inside her head. Because even if you weren't completely wrong? What she would have wanted for me doesn't matter. She's dead. And despite all the power I have at my fingertips... everything I know... I can't change that. I can't bring her back."

"Harry..."

Harry shook his head, looking down at his journal for a moment before realizing he wouldn't be getting any more work done tonight and closing it. It wasn't just any journal; the pages were filled with potions recipes, spell variations he'd personally created, and other things he felt that the outside world didn't need to know about magic. Each page had a snake printed across the top in deep green ink, enabling him to switch to parselscript when he made entries. Anyone other than him would just see squiggles on a page, assuming they even got the journal open without being killed by his rather... fierce... protections. "Just... stop trying, Hermione. I'm going to go start rounds. Try to keep to either Ron's room or the Head Girl's room tonight. I'm getting tired of having to explain certain entries on the point deduction log to Professor McGonagall." Without

waiting for a response, he shrunk his journal and stuffed it into a pocket before making his way out the portrait hole and into the hall.

After his rounds were done, taking longer than they would have if Hermione was still pulling her weight, Harry made his way out on the grounds, crossing the grass to sit atop a hill that looked down on Hogsmeade. He was allowed to leave the castle whenever he wanted to because... well, nobody could stop him. Not many would try, either, given he'd been responsible for the brutal deaths of a number of Inner Circle members along with Voldemort himself. If Harry could defeat Voldemort, a dark lord so evil that most wizards were too afraid to even speak his name, what chance did they have?

Suddenly remembering what day of the week it was, Harry set off down the lawn at a quick pace, passing through the front gates of the school and emerging from under the stifling pressure of the anti-apparition wards. While he was fairly certain that with a concerted effort, he could probably blow through the wards around Hogwarts and apparate from within the school itself... why bother? It was a nice night and walking to the edge of the wards before apparating negated the risk of damaging his core. Wrapping his magic around him, Harry disappeared with a barely audible pop, experiencing the trademark sensation of being squeezed through a tube for a few seconds before emerging with a second faint pop some seven hundred miles away. It was time, just as Harry had done every week since her death, for him to visit the graveyard at the recently reclaimed Potter Estate. To visit his fiancé's grave.

With her mother several years departed and her father in the Janus Thickey Ward a few beds down from Frank and Alice Longbottom, there had been nobody left to protest when Harry had opted to have his beloved's remains buried near his parents and other close family friends. And so now Luna Sòeng Indu Lovegood joined James Potter, Lily Potter née Evans, Remus Lupin, Nymphadora Lupin née Tonks, Sirius Black, Charlus Potter, Dorea Potter née Black, and Charlus's parents in the Potter Family Cemetery. An empty spot rested between Luna's grave and his mother's, waiting for the day Harry passed on so that he could join the two most important women in his life in eternal rest.

Standing over Luna's grave, Harry drew his wand and waved it over Luna's grave, a blast of blue light shot with bronze highlights

erupting from the head. Rather than heralding destruction, though, the spell's light hit the ground and expanded to cover a significant amount of space before fading to reveal dozens of perfect Ravenclaw blue roses with bronze tipped petals. Harry nodded in satisfaction and slid his wand back into its holster before circling around to kneel behind the grave, leaning forward to rest his forearms on the top of the cool granite as he settled in for his weekly chat.

"I hope Dumbledore was right and death is the next great adventure, because I'd hate to think you're as bored as I've been lately. Although everything I've ever read says death is supposed to be some sort of paradise, so you're probably off chasing snorkacks in the sky or somesuch. Which reminds me, I managed to convince the Wizengamot to release The Quibbler into my possession until your father gets out of St. Mungo's. So next month, we'll be back on the newsstands. And I'll be going to Sweden to try and find their breed of crumple-horned snorkacks, just like we were planning." Granted it was planned as their honeymoon, but either way he was fulfilling the promise he'd made to her, so... semantics. Harry tapped his fingers along the top of the gravestone slowly, thinking about what else he ought to share. "Oh, the harpy came after me again tonight. Wanted me to go to some party. At first to try and set me up with Ginny - again - and then she tried to throw half of the Gryffindor girls at me when I turned that down. Which, again, means you were right. That girl's not all there in the head. Hermione or Ginny, that is."

What else? Oh! "Su and I have actually stepped it up to lessons five days a week. Well, we meet every day: I help her with wand work five days a week and she tutors me five days a week too, with both on three days. Her grades are climbing to the point that Hermione might have some serious competition for the end of year marks and overall NEWT scores among this year's girls. And... well, I'm finally getting to the point where I can have a basic conversation without accidentally mentioning a squirrel."

Harry grinned ruefully at that and rubbed his left hand over the back of the right, remembering the multitude of light swats he'd received during their lessons. To be honest, he hadn't really expected to get much out of his half of the trade with the diminutive Chinese girl - tutoring in DADA and charms in exchange for lessons in Mandarin - but he had come to enjoy them anyways. When she wasn't smacking him on the hand with a conjured switch for incorrect word

choice or mangled pronunciation, that was. "She says that by the end of the school year, I might be to the point where she can begin working with me on some of her people's magic. Assuming we end up anywhere near each other after we graduate but... well, our great-grandchildren wouldn't have had to work. I think it's safe to say that I can afford to make myself available if I really want to. Which I do. Working with her is fun. She's.... fun. Thanks again for bringing her to join the DA. I don't know what I'd do without her now that you're gone and Ron and Hermione are... Ron and Hermione."

Sighing, Harry let his head drop so he could rest his forehead atop Luna's gravestone. "I guess... I guess I just don't see the point of it all. I did what I was supposed to do. I won the war. And what do I have to show for it? One friend. I have one friend left. And some sorta-friends from the DA, and housemates who act like they're my friends but I can barely even remember their names most days. This is what I gave you up to save? You, and Sirius and Remus, and my parents, and Neville, Hannah, Daphne, and the others? Talk about a kick in the jewels. I saved the world, but by the time I finally managed it, there was nothing left in it worth saving."

Silence fell as he leaned his head back, staring up into the clear night sky as he tried to figure out how to verbalize the thoughts running through his head. He noticed a few shooting stars burning past overhead and, as stupid as he knew it was, decided to partake in the old superstition and make a wish. Looking around, he waited for a few seconds before letting out a snort. Not that he'd expected much but ever since he'd discovered the wizarding world, all sorts of things he'd thought to be nothing more than myths had turned out to be real. Why not one more thing?

Feeling immensely stupid, Harry drew his wand again before casting a Warming Charm and a Cushioning Charm on the ground behind Luna's headstone. Technically he was violating a host of rules; students weren't allowed to be out this late, nor were they allowed off the grounds during the school year apart from trips to Hogsmeade. Who was going to say anything to him, though? He was Harry Potter.

Lowering himself to rest on the grass, Harry closed his eyes and let himself relax. Soon he found the magically created warmth and the noise of nature lulling him to sleep and he gave a mental shrug. Staying out overnight: one more infraction to add to the list of things

he wouldn't be punished for. As he drifted off, Harry thought he felt an odd falling sensation... but that was just ridiculous, because he was already lying on the ground.

Right?

When Harry woke up the next morning, he was exhausted. And not 'had a tough time sleeping' exhausted or 'Voldemort was sending me dreams of torturing muggles' exhausted. It was a bone deep weariness that had him utterly confused; he hadn't done anything worthy of that kind of achiness at all lately, much less in the last day or so. Then he looked around and noticed something was different.

Belay that... everything was different.

The grave he'd been lying on was gone, as were the roses he'd laid around it for Luna. Looking around wildly, Harry realized that not only was her grave gone, so was Remus's. And both his parents'. "If this is some kind of sick joke, I'm going to kill the person responsible in a way so painful, Voldemort would have watched on in awe!" That made him aware of another change: his voice sounded far, far younger and higher-pitched than it should at his age. Slowly, he looked down at his body and realized his voice wasn't the only thing younger than it should have been. "What the bloody hell?"

After taking a few minutes to calm down and examine his body more closely, Harry had come to the conclusion that... he had no idea what the hell was going on. For some bizarre reason, he was a preteen again. Bigger than he'd been upon arriving at Hogwarts, but that didn't take much given how the Dursleys had mistreated him and so he wasn't going to use that to gauge anything. He was still wearing his school uniform and black robe, although they were both understandably a bit too big for him in his current state. A flick of his wrist had... nothing jumping to his hand. His wand was gone. Scowling, Harry waved his hand and focused hard, binding his magic to his will and wandlessly transfiguring his oversized uniform into a pair of appropriately sized trousers and a t-shirt, along with trainers that weren't a few sizes too big. While his wand was gone, his magic was still at its seventeen-year-old levels despite his regressed age as best Harry could tell. So while he would be inconvenienced between now and his eleventh birthday, he wasn't helpless. Idly, he wondered if that meant he had reached full

magical growth - or close to it - early or if he'd be even stronger at seventeen the second time around.

Then again, that assumed this wasn't some bizarre dream or magically induced out of body experience and that he'd reach his eleventh birthday here, much less his seventeenth. Given he had no clue where he was, why he was there, or how he'd ended up younger than he ought to be in the first place... Harry decided that those questions should probably be given priority over musings about his potentially non-existent future. And since it was probably the easiest to figure out, Harry opted to start with the question of where he was.

As best he could tell, he was still on the grounds of the Potter Estate. In the graveyard, even. It was just far smaller than it was supposed to be, with only the headstones of his paternal grandparents and great-grandparents. Passing through the barrier of trees that separated the cemetery from the world at large, Harry came to an abrupt halt as he stared at Potter Mansion. It was... alive. There were hangings in the windows, smoke curling from the chimney, a few patio chairs sitting around a table just beyond the back door, and... a redheaded missile heading for him at top speed?

Ginny?

It wasn't until she slammed into him, almost knocking him over onto his back, that he got a good look at her and that just left Harry even more confused. Whoever she was, her eyes were hazel instead of chocolate brown like Ginny's, although their almond shape reminded Harry of his own. Her hair was also too dark a red to be Ginny's, reminding Harry almost of pictures he'd seen of his mother. Who... also had almond-shaped green eyes like him. But it was what came out of her mouth that really floored him. "Harry! You giant prat, where have you been all morning? You're going to be in so much trouble when we get home. I bet Mum's going to ground you from now until September. If she even lets you go to Hogwarts."

Harry's jaw dropped in shock before anger set in. What the hell was she trying to pull? His 'mum' had been dead for sixteen years now, and... wait a second. Taking a deep breath, Harry pushed aside his feelings and did his best to channel the 'inner Ravenclaw' Luna had always claimed he possessed. While his diminished size and age could be attributed to a potion or human transfiguration, some other

things about the situation were harder to explain. The shrunken graveyard, for one, or the aura of habitation that surrounded Potter Mansion. And if this was some dreamscape constructed by his mind... why would he have created a younger sibling for himself, and not just a world where his parents were still alive? Suddenly, Harry's thoughts from the night before came back to him. His wish upon a shooting star that the world would make sense again, and perhaps that he might even find someone to love again some day. What if, through some sort of brute force application of magic and willpower, he'd forced himself diagonally across time and space, stuffing his essence into the body of a younger, sibling possessing Harry Potter? The shade of Voldemort in Quirrell, the diary, the inevitable second war... they were all things he was familiar with and capable of handling, unlike the constant celebrations after his victory and the praise heaped upon him for it. It seemed too fantastical to believe, but what better explanation did he have?

Continuing to natter away, the redhead hopped off Harry and yanked him to his feet before punching him hard on the arm. "Mum's been really worried and she's had everyone out looking for you. Rose and I have been taking turns sitting in the house with the spare mirror in case you came home and wandering around the neighborhood, and Uncle Remus, Uncle Sirius, and Dad have been apparating up and down half of Cornwall all morning. Dad took off from work and you know what that means..." Harry's brain froze, and he tuned out the rest of her almost Hermione-esque rant.

Uncle Sirius?

Uncle Remus?

Sirius and Remus were alive here? Sirius was free? What? How?

"Right. Well, why don't we get home so we can tell everyone you found me and they can stop looking, yeah?" While Harry still wasn't quite sure what to make of the situation, her words did lend a bit of credence to his idea of being in an alternate universe. If this was a dream, why on Earth had his subconscious created not one but two sisters for himself - or at least he assumed Rose was a sister given the flower name and not a friend of this girl - who he had to share the attention of his parents, Sirius, and Remus with?

"Harry!" He looked over just in time for another body to slam into him, this one bigger and pulling him in for a hug instead of bowling him over like his sister had. Pushing up on his toes, he peered over her shoulder and watched his supposed sister mouth the word 'grounded' before an identical girl came strolling out of the back of the house, elbowing her twin in the ribs. The aforementioned Rose, Harry was guessing. Which meant the woman hugging him could only be... "Harry?"

Nodding, Harry pulled back and studied the woman in front of him intently. It was indeed his long dead mother, albeit a version older than any he'd seen in pictures. Which made sense, if this was some bizarre universe where they'd survived that fateful Halloween. If he was ten or so - he was guessing it was the summer before his first year, based on his sister's comment - then this woman was almost a decade older than his had been at the time of her death. "Hey, err, Mum. It's me. I'm okay. Really."

There was a crack behind him and the shocks kept coming as Harry whirled around to face the newcomer. An older version of his father was standing there, an irritated expression on his face. Raising his wand to his temple, he sent two separate patronus messengers racing off into the woods before returning his attention to Harry... or rather Lily. "I'm going to head in. Maybe they'll let me log a half shift or a full shift from noon till eight. I'd appreciate you remembering to keep a plate of dinner for me this time." Giving Harry one last look, James turned away and disappeared into thin air with a crack of apparition.

Harry just stared blankly at the empty space for a long minute before shaking his head. That was his father in this universe? Wow. What... what a dick. Not quite up there with Lucius Malfoy or anything, but hardly the Father of the Year material he'd - perhaps irrationally - expected of him. It sealed the alternate universe hypothesis for him, though. After all, if this was a dream, why wasn't his father a nicer, more caring person? There was another crack off to their left and Harry tensed again out of instinct, but again resisted the urge to do something stupid. A good thing, he realized a second later, because wandlessly cursing his godfather would have caused him no end of problems. "Hey! James told me you found the squirt!" A very much alive, young, and healthy Sirius reached forward to ruffle his hair. "Lemme guess, he went in to work as soon as he found out?" Sighing, Lily nodded and Sirius rolled his eyes. "Wanker.

He may be the brother I... well, the brother Regulus should have been... but he's still a wanker sometimes. Alright, want Anastasiya and Cassie to come over for lunch? Keep you, Remus, and the kids company?"

Waving towards the house, Lily dismissed the twins... and him, Harry found out as she pinned him with a long stare until he began following them. As he departed, his mother's voice drifted to him. "Might as well. Anastasiya and Remus are the only adult conversation I get apart from when You-Know-Who visits."

"Ouch. I'll have you know I can be perfectly adult when I feel like it."

"Which is when?"

"Well, never. And does You-Know-Who actually count as adult conversation? You two are never talking for long..."

"Sirius!"

Slipping into the house, Harry tried to process what he'd just heard. His mother... was having an affair? That's what it sounded like, at any rate. Not with Sirius or Remus, evidently, but with someone the former knew. And his father's best friend knew but wasn't evidently sharing that information. Wait. Stop. These weren't the same people he'd known - or wished he'd known - back in his home universe. Hell, for all he knew, maybe it wasn't adultery. Maybe polyandry was the norm here and he'd yet to meet his mother's other husband, which was who Sirius was referring to. And they were just very amorous and so they didn't spend much of their free time talking. Not bloody likely, but it was a reminder that he needed to keep his preconceptions stifled and his mind open.

Wandering the ground floor of the house, Harry quickly discovered that at least it was familiar. The back door led into a 'breakfast' nook, which was in turn connected to both the kitchen and the living room. Starting in the kitchen and heading clockwise, he circled through the kitchen, formal dining room, and sitting room before passing by a staircase - for now; he'd explore upstairs in a minute - and slipping down a hall to find his father's study in the same place as it had been in his world. One wall was dedicated to a massive family tree and Harry began scanning it for names he recognized. Finally, he found his parents and traced a finger down to find three names:

Harry Potter, Jasmine Potter, Rose Potter. So his tackler's name was Jasmine. He snorted. Evidently Lily had imposed her family's naming traditions on the next generation of Potter women. Thank God he was her eldest son and not her eldest daughter. He'd discovered a journal of hers in his original timeline... the woman had been considering naming him Dahlia if he'd been a girl.

Harry shuddered. Oh yes, that would have been an easy name to inspire fear with. Dahlia Potter, Slayer of Death Eaters, Destroyer of Voldemort. Somehow, it lacked the same oomph as Harry Potter.

Pausing, Harry eyed the dates under the three names. His birthday was still on July 31st, with Jasmine on June 6th of the following year and Rose on June 7th. He double-checked the dates, his math, and then blinked. In just shy of eleven months, his mother had given birth to him and then gotten pregnant with and delivered his twin sisters. They were Irish triplets. Sweet Merlin, didn't these people know what a Contraceptive Charm was for?

Quiet laughter and conversation drifted Harry's way and he frowned before identifying the voices: Remus Lupin and his mother. They didn't seem to be heading his way but since he wanted to explore a bit more before being tied down by the inevitable conversation to demand answers, he slipped out of his father's study and made his way back to the stairs, ascending them to the first floor.

Directly across from the staircase was what turned out to be the master suite, Harry discovered after a quick inspection. Curious as he was, he decided to keep moving in case Lily decided to come upstairs and change. Proceeding down the hall, he found a bathroom on the left that reeked strongly of fruit and a closed door that was protected by several locking charms he opted not to disturb. It was marked by the letters 'NB' in a paint that constantly shifted colors, which simultaneously hinted at the identity of the occupant and confused Harry because... why would she be living at Potter Manor? And using those initials? Moving further down the hall, he found a pair of bedrooms that had 'Rose' and 'Jasmine' painted on the respective doors in gold cursive writing. Harry frowned at the lack of a bedroom for him before remembering the second floor of the manor and the two large bedrooms up their; his parents must have put him upstairs, presumably to keep him and the girls from feuding over a shared bathroom. The remaining room was probably a guest room or something. Resolving to continue his searching

later, he returned to the ground floor and made his way into the kitchen.

The manor was so much nicer with people inside it, Harry decided. Lived in like the Burrow, but more orderly and without the fear that sneezing too hard would leave a family homeless. On the other hand, it shared the look of wealth that Malfoy Manor had, albeit in a slightly more understated and warmer way. It was in a word, perfect. Seating himself next to Remus at the kitchen island, watching his mother bustle around making a simple lunch of soup and sandwiches, only to be pulled from his thoughts by the sound of his mother's voice. "Harry, what's wrong? Usually you'd be out back flying your broom or reading your father's prank journal so you can try and play tricks on your sisters and me. You're awfully quiet, too. Are you sure you're feeling okay? Not that I mind that you're actually behaving yourself for once, of course, but... well, I guess I'm waiting for the other shoe to drop."

Harry nodded, still uncertain enough in this strange new world to be leery of answering. The last thing he needed was to set off alarms in his mother's head by giving an answer that would be completely out of character for... God, this world's him sounded like as much of a prick as his father. Joy. Hopefully he'd be able to redefine their perceptions of him in short order, because that wasn't a role he wanted to play for long. At the moment, though, he needed something to satisfy her curiosity with. Maybe he could try... "Well, I missed breakfast. I figure if I hang out with you, I can get first dibs on lunch and grab all the best bits for myself." He grinned and rubbed his hands together greedily, which made his mother laugh before turning away to face the counter again.

"Fine, but you're in charge of taking Jasmine and Rose to the market in Falmouth tomorrow to pick up our weekly order." The way she phrased it made it seem like it was supposed to be a punishment but why it would be, Harry had no idea. Did he and his siblings not get along? Were they little hellions too? Harry watched Lily bring the sandwich platter out to the breakfast nook before returning and poking his stomach. "It'll get you out of the house in a useful way for once and besides, you know you need the exercise."

He what? Harry glanced down at his midsection and did a double take at the size of his stomach. Holy shit. He really did need the exercise. He was worse than Neville in their first year. How could

someone as young and presumably active as his younger self be so chubby?

"Well, I guess I can put off my busy day of flying, flying, and flying to help you out."

"It's either that or you can follow me around doing chores for the next few days so I know where you are at all times?"

"Falmouth it is, Mum."

Joe's Note: If you're having problems visualizing the house, it's heavily based - on the interior at least - on a real set of blueprints that I can link you to if you message me. Apart from that... not much else to say. Other than that while I don't do that stupid 'holding chapters hostage' shit, I've got nothing against whoring for reviews and so... review please!

A few minutes later, his sisters swept past the island on their way from the living room to the supposed breakfast nook that evidently served other meals as well. Lily handed Harry a separate plate bearing a sandwich larger than any of the ones that had gone by on the platter before shooing him in the same direction, the fireplace off to his left flaring as he slid off the island stool. The green flames of an incoming floo connection danced merrily for a moment and then Sirius emerged, followed by a statuesque woman with wheat blonde hair and a brunette girl who looked to be his sisters' age. As the blonde approached the table, a tickle against Harry's mind made him twitch before realizing he recognized the sensation: it was similar to how he felt around Fleur, albeit several magnitudes stronger. Reinforcing his occlumency shields to prevent himself from doing something stupid, Harry sat back and waited to see how the room settled.

Remus sat in the middle of one side of the table, the twins claiming spots on either side of him. Lily and Sirius took opposite ends of the table, with Sirius's wife seating herself at his left and leaving the spot to his right open. With the blonde the only occupant of her side of the table, it left three seats for Harry to pick from along with the one between Rose and Sirius. He opted to take the seat directly at his mother's right, blinking as Sirius's daughter slid into the seat next to him. The twins abruptly went from snickering at something Remus had whispered to them to glaring and Harry looked from them to the blushing, very shy looking brunette beside him before he caught on. Sirius's daughter had a crush on him. Jasmine and Rose were not amused. Great. He forced himself to smile even though he wanted to bang his head against the table. Out of all the things that he'd thought having a family would mean, overprotective siblings was not one of them. Suddenly he found himself able to empathize with how Ginny must have felt... and then his mind leapt from there to less pleasant thoughts about his stalker, forcing him to clench his fist as he further reinforced his occlumency shields, banishing his feelings and regaining control through brute force. He had to pay attention.

The only reason he even had names for these people was because he had good ears. Apart from that, he knew nothing about them and so unless he listened, thought fast, and spoke carefully, they represented yet more threats to his chances of remaining hidden.

His godfather had a wife and daughter. It was an incredibly bizarre thought to try and wrap his mind around, since all of his encounters with Sirius had come after the man had suffered in Azkaban for twelve years and was on the run as a fugitive from the law. Here, obviously, that had never happened and he'd forged a nice life for himself as best Harry could tell. As he nibbled on his sandwich, Harry remained quiet and let the various conversations swirl around him, absorbing as much information as he could. The last thing he needed was to be exposed because he didn't know something he should have, or knew something the adults didn't think he should.

While Harry was by no means an expert when it came to deciphering foreign accents, he recognized Anastasiya's as vaguely similar to Viktor Krum's but distinctly different at the same time. Over the course of lunch's conversation, he managed to confirm his suspicions: Anastasiya was from Ustynivka, Ukraine, where Sirius had stumbled across a small colony of veela. After the war had ended, he'd decided to dip into the Black vaults and go on a world tour to 'find himself'. Harry didn't know whether or not Sirius had succeeded on that front, but he had found a wicked hot wife at the very least. It made him wonder... Bill's coworkers had been in awe of him snagging a quarter-veela. What would they have said to Sirius?

Cassiopeia - Cassie in casual conversation, but the signature House of Black astronomy name had come out when Anastasiya had chided her daughter for missing her bowl with half a ladleful of soup - had medium brown hair that looked to be a shade perfectly halfway between Anastasiya and Sirius's hair colors, along with blue-grey eyes that likewise seemed to straddle the line between her two parents. He didn't know much about veela development, but assumed the fact she was only ten was why he felt no allure coming off her despite the hesitant, blushing glances she kept sending him. Harry bit back a groan at that. It was like Ginny Weasley all over again. Hopefully Cassie was smarter and saner, or things had the potential to get awkward quickly when she entered puberty. Harry found himself idly wondering what she'd done to irritate the twins so. Something to look into later, he supposed.

Remus, sadly, lacked both a significant other and children at present. Evidently this world wasn't any kinder to its werewolves than Harry's original had been. Thinking back, Harry remembered Remus mentioning an interest in one or two of their fellow Order members during firewhiskey fueled moments of sharing. Maybe he could manipulate things so Remus met them again in this world, except without the shadow of war and painful death hanging over them to squash the romantic mood.

The werewolf was still a part of the extended Potter-Black-Lupin family, though, entertaining the twins with jokes as the group passed the soup pot and sandwich platters around. Lily would occasionally scold him for a joke that skirted the line of good taste, making Harry raise an eyebrow. His world's Remus had never been that relaxed in the four years he'd known the man. Fascinating. When she wasn't busy scolding Remus, Lily would engage Anastasiya in discussions about what Harry was pretty sure were the latest advancements in the field of enchanting; while he could cast spells with the best of them and even knew how most of his repertoire worked these days, that was one field he'd never gotten around to touching and so it was all Gobbledegook to him.

Sitting beside the quiet Cassie, Harry slowly worked through his lunch, enjoy the sounds of his happy family and the simple but tasty food. His good mood came to an abrupt end when he found a pair of green eyes boring into his own. They were quite familiar; he saw them in the mirror every day. After all, he'd been told ever since he'd first entered the wizarding world that he had his mother's eyes. "Harry? What possessed you to wander off this morning before the rest of us got up? And where'd you go? I had to call in Sirius and Remus, your father was late to work..."

"I... uhh..." Harry racked his brain, trying desperately to come up with an answer to give her. Nothing. Absolutely nothing came to mind to explain such odd behavior in a ten-year-old. Bugger. Maybe his mother had a sense of humor? She had to have one to be married to James Potter... right? "You don't need to know where he was this morning."

"I don't need to know where you were this morning."

"This isn't the son you're looking for."

"You aren't the son I'm looking for."

"He can go back to his lunch."

"You can go back to your lunch."

"Eat up."

"Eat up... eat up." The twins were giggling away, even as Anastasiya tried to affect a politely confused smile rather than admit she had no idea what was going on. Cassie, Sirius, and Remus seemed likewise baffled. His mother's lips quirked upward at his evasion attempt, but she didn't join the twins in laughing at his joke. "But fine. If you don't want to tell me, you can tell your father when he gets home tonight. And I'll let him set your punishment."

The way his sisters abruptly stopped laughing told Harry that doing as much would be a Very Bad Thing for him and his future in this house. "Um... can we discuss it after, then? You know, so I don't have to embarrass myself in front of everyone?"

Lily eyed him before nodding slowly. "Fine. But you'd better have a darn good excuse, young man." Picking her sandwich back up, she paused just before biting into it and let out a small snort of laughter. "I never should have taken you to see the trilogy when they were rereleased. Although the Jabba imitation you did the first time you met your cousin Dudley... that was hilarious." Thank God he'd actually seen the movies here. Harry hadn't even thought about that before trying his little joke out. That would have been a hell of an awkward explanation, to be sure.

When lunch ended, Harry made his way back to the first floor landing before ascending the stairs to the second floor in search of his room. When he finally found it, he could only stare in awe. It was huge, especially compared to his room at the Dursleys' house. Hanging on one wall was a Nimbus 2000 and there were Falmouth Falcons quidditch posters and memorabilia everywhere. Strangely enough, there literally wasn't a book in sight, not even something fictional for pleasure reading. Clearly, he was not an intellectual in this world or at least he hadn't been in the past. With everything he knew now, it would be hard to avoid being labeled as a bookworm

unless he severely downplayed what he knew and could do... and that wasn't something he was entirely keen on doing.

He could ponder his future at a later date, though. What did he want to do with his afternoon? Harry still knew almost nothing about this self and the world he lived in... and he really didn't want to get into the habit of seriously mentally invading his family and friends. So he decided to adopt Hermione's outlook on life: when in doubt, go to the library. Unlike the Potter Manor he was familiar with, the second floor connector to what should have been the library instead led to a room with a large television and other expensive-looking electronics. Adding it to his list of questions to answer at a later point, Harry backtracked to the first floor landing and gained access to the slightly smaller, two-storied library via the twin of the hallway that had dumped him into the strange muggle room upstairs. He quickly found a book on modern history with the help of a wandless Summoning Charm and settling down in an armchair to do some light reading.

What he found shocked him. This Harry's parents had escaped Voldemort three times on the battlefield, but the house had never been attacked at the end of the first war. Voldemort had attacked the Longbottoms first, turning Neville into the Boy-Who-Lived. According to the notes scrawled in the margins in a looping, feminine script, Neville was the son of Frank Longbottom and a near-squib witch who had been willing to let Alice take credit for continuing the Longbottom line in exchange for a life of comfort. She had been hired on as Neville's nanny after delivering him and had been the sole adult home when Voldemort attacked, imparting the same protection upon death that allowed him to become the Boy-Who-Lived of this world while still retaining both parents. Or at least both publicly known ones. Just like Harry did, this Neville now possessed the lightning bolt scar that marked him as Voldemort's supposed equal. Although assuming the prophecy here was the same, it confirmed a suspicion of Harry's and finally provided an answer to an argument he'd had with Dumbledore before the headmaster's death... not that he'd be able to tell the man now.

That raised two interesting questions, though, and Harry made sure he was alone before wandlessly conjuring up a mirror. Well, any reference to his scar would be in the past tense from here on out. It was gone now. Interesting. And if that was true, then... another wave of his hand created a small, silvery-red viper. § Hello? §

After turning back and forth to assess its surroundings, tongue flicking out of its mouth to taste the air, the viper raised its head to stare at Harry. § What is it that you desire, Master? §

Even more interesting. He apparently had shed his link to Voldemort but had somehow retained the most infamous power he'd inherited from the Heir of Slytherin. He reminded himself to look on the bright side: at least it meant that he could still read his parselscript journal. Losing that would have been a royal pain in the arse. With a quick Vanishing Charm, the viper was gone and Harry went back to reading about the recent past. Or at least recent in so far as this world was concerned; losing close to a decade was playing havoc with his sense of relative time.

Moving on to just after Voldemort's fall, Harry discovered that Igor Karkaroff had again betrayed his comrades and provided the Ministry with a list of names. Lucius had again bought his way out of trouble, the LeStrange trio was in Azkaban, albeit for crimes unnamed... and Peter Pettigrew had not only been named, but captured and imprisoned? That was new. He was currently serving three consecutive life sentences in Azkaban for crimes also not listed in the book but was, at least at the time of printing, still alive. Harry checked the publishing information. A year ago. How that weak, pitiful, miserable excuse for a human being had been able to survive this long, even with the benefit of his animagus form, Harry had no idea.

It was so odd, finding himself in a place where things he'd taken for granted as 'fact' weren't anymore, while other things that had been completely and totally screwed up in his world were finally set to rights. Letting his thoughts wander down that path led Harry to wondering if his original self here had kept a journal, so he could get a better idea of how he was supposed to behave around everyone. Even if this wasn't really his family, it was the closest he'd ever get and the last thing he wanted was to be torn away because Dumbledore thought he was a renegade Death Eater impersonating Harry Potter or something.

As time marched on and day turned into night, Harry continued to read, totally unaware of the progression of time. Dinner passed without him noticing and it wasn't until his stomach rumbled noisily that he realized it'd been a while since he'd last eaten. Closing his

book, he looked up and found his mother standing in the doorway with a plate of food. "Hi?"

"Hey, Harry. You missed dinner. And that explanation you owe me." Lily entered the library, setting his dinner down in front of him. "So... last chance. Your father will be home in twenty minutes or so and if I don't have something to tell him..."

Harry had been thinking about this one on and off for a good chunk of the afternoon, and was pretty sure he'd finally come up with an acceptable answer. Hopefully. Maybe. He'd had plenty of incidents of accidental magic at Privet Drive; what were the odds that he hadn't had any here? "Well, I woke up early and couldn't get back to sleep, so I took a shower and still nobody else was up... so I was sitting there staring out the window wondering if that first train up the Maritime Line had gone by yet. Next thing I know, I feel like I'm being squeezed through this really tight tube and then I'm standing on that little stone bridge on Trewedna Lane, looking down at the track."

Closing her eyes, Lily let out a muttered string of swears in four languages - English, French, Cornish, and one that even Harry didn't recognize - before calming herself and sighing noisily. "I keep telling your father that we need to deal with that. 'It's not accidental magic when he's apparating six or seven times a month, James.' 'If he does it after July 31st, we're in deep shit, James.' But no. It'll sort itself out. Having a wand will settle your magic down. Trust him, he's the pureblood and he knows all about magical children. Well fine. If he's not going to take responsibility for his children and help me with this, then he's not allowed to be mad when his decisions come back to bite him on the ar... erm, bum." Looking around at the books Harry had pulled from the shelves for research, Lily arched a brow. "Need help finding something?"

There was a loud whoosh from downstairs and Harry shook his head. "Err, no thanks. Because if you're here, he'll come up here looking for you, and it'll make it harder to avoid the angry father by hiding in here." Lily opened her mouth to say something but Harry waved his hand. "He was angry when he left and I don't think he's in a better mood now. All the crazies come out at night, so he probably had more work than his normal shift. So it's probably better if I'm out of his hair until he relaxes a bit. Even if it is all his own fault."

Lily grimaced before nodding her assent. "Alright. I'll check in on you later." Heading for the library door, she shook her head sadly. "One of these days, I'll figure out a way to avoid Azkaban and then I'll kill those damn Longbottoms for turning my husband into..."

Another interesting bit of information that Harry filed away for further review as he went back to reading and began blindly consuming his dinner. It wasn't bad, although the chicken was awfully bland. So were the vegetables, for that matter. Given that they were living in Cornwall, which was growing in culinary importance as its primary industry shifted from mining to farming and fishing, and his mother seemed to be the stay at home type, he'd - perhaps irrationally - expected better. Maybe there was a way he could impart a bit of his own culinary expertise onto his mother without her becoming suspicious?

Eventually, the clock struck nine and Harry decided to relocate to his room as he heard his mother puttering around, taking care of the twins. As he entered his own room, he again had to squash his paranoid instincts; his parents would not react well to finding an array of locking and privacy charms on his door.

As he changed into a pair of pajamas, Harry frowned as he inspected his pudgy body. Maybe he could find more chores to do that involved walking places outside of this weekly market run he was being sent on tomorrow. While he was nowhere close to Dudley's level of fatness, he had surpassed where Neville was back in first year in his old universe. Which definitely wasn't the lean, muscular figure he was used to. He definitely had to start working out again; even if he wasn't the Boy-Who-Lived in this world, he wasn't going to just sit back and let Voldemort run wild. Neville might be the only one capable of killing the bastard in this dimension because of Trelawney's damned prophecy, but that didn't mean he couldn't help. And kill a whole lot of Death Eaters along the way.

Hmm. Well, when in doubt, fall back on his normal Privet Drive workout: long walks that became long jogs that became long runs. Setting his alarm clock for five in the morning, which would hopefully get him up before the rest of the family, Harry crawled into bed and fell asleep almost immediately.

The next month at Potter Manor was fun for Harry once he managed to settle in and find his place. It was just like he'd always dreamed

life in a world with no Voldemort would have been like. Well, almost. He would have preferred two loving parents but a loving mother and a distant father was close enough for his tastes. And the two sisters and cool older cousin made up for James's absence pretty well. It was like being back at the Burrow again, back in the days before Ginny became an obsessive stalker and his friendship with Ron imploded. Except here, he didn't feel bad about a poor family taking in yet another mouth to feed and could relax and enjoy things more. He'd even found a journal, stashed under a floorboard in his room, written by this universe's original Harry. Having read that from cover to cover a few times, he was now doing a much better job of fitting in... or at least he was only arousing a little suspicion as he subtly began changing their expectations of him to match who he really was.

Returning from his five-mile morning run - which was actually a run these days, instead of a walk around Perranarworthal like when he'd started - Harry looked at the clock and smiled. He'd shaved another few seconds off his previous best time. Excellent. The house was still as quiet as a tomb and so after using a few spells to freshen up until he could take a proper shower, Harry decided to treat his family to breakfast. After all, he was up and surely his mother would enjoy a break from cooking. That, and after years with the Dursleys, it felt downright odd to be staying at home and not cooking every meal.

He worked quickly but efficiently, cooking up large portions of scrambled eggs, sausages, black pudding, bacon, fried mushrooms and tomatoes, baked beans, and hash browns. He'd seen in the past how much food his family could pack away, especially his father, although Jasmine and Rose weren't exactly pixies either. And none of the three could hold a candle to his cousin when it came to packing food away. As much as it looked like on the counter, Harry severely doubted there'd be anything left when they were done. Footsteps on the stairs alerted him that his family was awake, and Harry grabbed the serving platters and bowls, moving them to the table in the breakfast nook. His mother and the twins were the first to arrive, stopping dead in the doorway and staring in disbelief at the breakfast he'd prepared. "Morning."

Jasmine was the first to break out of her stupor, hurrying over to the table while eyeing the food hungrily. "Wow, Harry. I never knew you could cook."

"Uhh, well, I can't. Or would that be couldn't? I found a cookbook in the library that had moving pictures so you could watch everything being done from all kinds of angles. After watching it for a month now, I decided it didn't look too hard and I figured I'd give it a try." Technically it was true... for the Harry of this universe. He'd found the book, tried his hand at it, failed miserably, and been stuck scrambling to clean up the evidence before his mom came down to cook breakfast. This time around, though, Harry had succeeded, although it wasn't exactly his first time in the kitchen and he had actual skill rather than just having peeked at a book.

Lily just smiled and kissed Harry on the cheek. "Is that what you've been up to whenever I catch you in the library?" Err... not at all, but it sounded like a good excuse, so Harry nodded. "I'm so proud of you, Harry." He blushed as his sisters mocked him, but their amusement at his expense didn't keep them from descending on the food like Ron Weasley, serving up heaping plates for themselves that they began to devour. His mother followed suit, albeit a good deal more slowly and neatly. Biting into one of the fried mushrooms, she let out a moan the likes of which Harry had previously only heard when he interrupted romantic interludes while on patrol. Well then. Evidently she liked his cooking?

Stumbling into the kitchen, Nymphadora 'Dora' Black announced herself with a sleepy 'wotcher' before plopping herself down into a chair and fixing herself a plate. Finding out that she was the occupant of the locked bedroom on the first floor had been a validation of his suspicions but at the same time a hell of a shock. The original Harry had never felt the need to document his family tree and so it had taken a bit of creative questioning, eavesdropping, and detective work to figure out why the young woman lived at Potter Manor. Evidently Bellatrix Lestrange and her husband had dropped by to 'chat' with her sister Andromeda shortly before the end of the war and had executed Ted Tonks before turning their attention to Andromeda herself. Showing herself to be a true daughter of the House of Black, Andromeda had led them on a running battle through the house, all the way up to Dora's room, at which point she'd managed to actually overpower and blow through the anti-apparition ward her sister had cast over the house. She'd arrived in the lobby of St. Mungo's and promptly dropped dead from a burnt out magical core, at which point Lily had taken the parentless Dora as a favor for Sirius, seeing as how she and James had both the spare room and the experience with raising children,

while Sirius and Anastasiya had no such experience and called a different hotel in a different city each week 'home'.

Dora began to choke and gasp and Lily rolled her eyes before drawing her wand and flicking it. A glowing hand appeared in the air behind the metamorphmagus before swinging down and slapping her hard on the back. Two chunks of half-eaten mushroom came flying out of her mouth to land on the table, eliciting squeals of disgust from the twins before Lily could vanish the mess. Tucking her wand away, the older redhead just rolled her eyes. "There's this newfangled thing called 'chewing', Dora. Try it for me, would you?"

Hair shifting from the long black curls of her base form to a long, straight, bright red mane, Dora ducked her head in an attempt to hide her blush. "Sorry, Aunt Lily. This is really good, though." After a few seconds, her hair shortened and lightened into the bubblegum pink spikes that Harry was used to seeing and she gave Harry a thumbs up before selecting a fried tomato, popping it into her mouth, and chewing with exaggerated slowness.

"Hey, what's that smell?" James was the last to make his presence known, stumbling into the kitchen with his hair mussed and standing up strangely. Or maybe not. Maybe he was just trying to do something new with it today? "Wow, Lily. You haven't bothered cooking a full breakfast for something other than a holiday in... Merlin knows how long, actually. What's the occasion?"

Shrugging, Lily swallowed another mouthful of mushroom before pointing her fork at Harry. "Ask him. He's the one who cooked it."

James almost missed his chair as he stared at Harry in disbelief. "What... Harry? Since when can you..?"

"Wow!" Everyone turned to look at Jasmine, who was staring at Harry with wide eyes. "I wanted to try everything first to make sure he hadn't gotten lucky... it's all great! Sorry, Mum, but Harry's a way better cook than you. No offense."

Rose nodded in agreement as James stared at his food suspiciously, looking from it to Harry and back several times. "Considering your mother has been cooking longer than Harry's been alive, I find that hard to believe." After serving up a bit of everything for himself, he decided to try a forkful of Harry's scrambled eggs first. After chewing

slowly and swallowing, he turned to stare at Harry with an unreadable expression on his face. "Huh. I'll be damned."

Letting out a vaguely affirmative noise, Lily sliced off a piece of her fried tomato and popped it into her mouth before patting Harry's hand. "Sweetie, this is wonderful. Would you like to help me cook breakfast from now on?"

Looking up from where he was cutting up a piece of sausage for himself, Harry continued to blush from all the compliments, only to freeze at the question. "Honestly, it was just going to be a one-time thing. I wanted to give you the morning off because you cook all the time."

"Can't you give me all the mornings off then?" Lily held up a piece of sausage speared on the end of her fork. "But no, seriously, this is amazing, especially for a first timer, and..."

As much as he loved his new family, he had no desire to be trapped in a situation like at the Dursleys and Harry held up his hand. "It's okay, Mum. How about I'll help out with both breakfast and lunch sometimes, but only if you're there with me?"

Lily smiled and kissed him on the cheek. "Okay. And thank you for cooking this morning, it was sweet of you. I'm sure the girls are going to be all over you when you're older. A man who knows how to be useful around the house is hard to find." James scowled at her comment but Lily quelled him with a glare and the family went back to eating, chattering about everything and yet nothing at all over breakfast.

The first to finish eating, James disappeared into his study for a few minutes, emerging in the red cloak of an auror and disappearing through the floo to go to work. Tonks likewise disappeared to her room upstairs before returning with a similar garment, subtle differences marking it as the cloak of a trainee instead of a full-fledged auror, and stepping through the floo herself. The twins finished next, disappearing back upstairs to change and get ready for their day, leaving Harry alone at the table as his mother began to levitate the dirty dishes towards the sink. After flaring green again, the floo deposited a familiar brunette in the kitchen and Harry waved to Cassie. Standard weekday procedure for the family, he had quickly learned; evidently Anastasiya had a career and so Lily had

become the de facto childcare provider for both families. The half-veela girl let out a squeak and blushed, ducking her head, and Harry sighed before sliding off his chair.

Shower versus annoyingly shy preteen admirer.

Shower won hands down.

After emerging from the shower, feeling a good deal more human than when he'd entered, Harry went into his room and retrieved the copy of *Hogwarts, A History* he'd found in the library before curling up in a chair in the living room. Who would have thought the book was so interesting? Well, apart from Hermione. It also helped him see that, apart from who Voldemort had attacked, the only differences between the two realities were those in the last ten years or so. Slytherin wasn't suddenly a hero of the wizarding world, and it was still Helga rather than Herbert Hufflepuff or something bizarre like that. It was comforting to know that he could at least expect school to be familiar, even if the people around him weren't.

He was left largely alone for at least an hour, until someone perching on the arm of his chair interrupted his solitude. Looking up, he found himself staring into the blue-grey eyes of Cassie. His other self's journal had done him a world of good in understanding the brunette and how she fit into both the Potter family as a whole and his life in specific: she crushed on him, the twins didn't approve, and his original self had thought girls were gross and gone out of his way to mock and torment her.

He, on the other hand, saw the value in making friends with Cassie and reshaping her interest into something more platonic. After all, if she persisted in crushing on him, he could be in for a world of trouble when her aura manifested. He knew he could easily repress a quarter-veela's general aura, but he'd never tried a half-veela or a veela of any degree who was specifically interested in him. Not to mention a woman scorned with the ability to warp most men into willing servants was a very dangerous woman indeed. So being far nicer to Cassie was near the top of his to-do list and now was the perfect time to start, at least in his mind. "Hey, Cassie."

"Hiya." Blushing, Cassie fidgeted on the arm of his chair, causing Harry to instinctively wrap one arm around her waist to still her the

way he did with Hermione when she was excited. That just made her blush darker and Harry quickly pulled his arm away from her. Her hand shot out, grabbing his wrist and halting his retreat as she examined him. "Wow. Have you been working out?"

Well that was convenient. He'd been looking for some way to tie his two newest 'not Harry' behaviors together and she had given him an opening to do it with just one lie. "Yeah. I heard that fit wizards are more powerful - I mean, look at our dads compared to some of the fat lumps we've seen when we go to Diagon Alley - so I've been running in the morning. It'll come in handy, especially if I'm a Gryffindor or Ravenclaw at Hogwarts. Their common rooms are both on the seventh floor. Anyways, after I started running, I kept coming home hungry and breakfast was either half-ready or Mum was still in bed. So I started looking into how to cook my own food." Cassie nodded at that one; it did sound sensible enough. Gently prying his arm out of her grasp, Harry cast about for a question that would turn the conversation away from himself. "Can you cook? Both your parents are purebloods and most of them think housekeeping is 'woman's work'... not that Uncle Sirius or Dad would ever let my mum catch them saying that."

Cassie shook her head, a small frown on her face. "I try to cook, but I'm pants at it. I think even my dad is better than I am, and he managed to blow up that muggle toaster your mum bought him. It's okay, though. I have years to get the hang of it before I'm married and need to cook for my family."

As much as he wanted to, Harry resisted the urge to comment on that. After all, while neither the Blacks nor Weasleys were dark, both retained the somewhat male chauvinist ideas about the world that were popular in the wizarding world. It was just the way society operated. So instead of urging her to throw off the shackles of the patriarchy and tell men where to shove it when they asked her to cook dinner, Harry decided on another route, one that would also advance his friend agenda. "If you want, maybe your dad will let you floo over here a bit earlier in the mornings. I'm going to be helping Mum with breakfast and lunch sometimes and you could learn from us."

"Really? Oh, thanks Harry!" Cassie slid off the arm of the chair and into his lap, hugging him tight. Harry just patted her awkwardly on the back. Wait a second. Was this really going to help with the crush

problem, on second thought? After pondering the matter for a few seconds, Harry decided it likely would. Hopefully forcing her to spend time around him in such a mundane activity instead of admiring him from afar would show her that he was just Harry, rather than something worth getting worked up about.

Besides, they'd grown up together thanks to the closeness of their families. She was practically his sister. Cassie crushing on him was just... wrong.

When the day of his birthday arrived, Harry received another first: the first birthday party ever thrown for him by his family. While it wasn't too different from spending it with the Weasleys, apart from the people present, it was the fact that it was his family that made it special for him. His father actually wasn't at work for once and the non-Dora Blacks were obviously there, as were Remus and a very surprising pair of guests: Narcissa Malfoy and a polite but aloof blonde girl his age named Tara. Her son and husband were both absent, though, which made Harry wonder why they were there. Still, Narcissa had spoken to him politely and handed him a gift before heading over to sit with Lily and Anastasiya while Tara seemed to get along well enough with Cassiopeia, so he wasn't inclined to paint Narcissa with the same brush as her husband... at least for now. And he couldn't do such a thing with Tara until he figured out exactly who the heck the girl was and whether or not he should be wary of her.

His presents were nothing special and yet incredibly special at the same time: clothes, books, trinkets from Zonko's... nothing of earth-shattering significance, but full of sentimental value in that they were the first presents he'd received from his parents. Well, that he could remember at any rate; he assumed they'd bought him presents for his first birthday in the old world but damned if he could remember what they'd gotten him. He'd half expected socks or something from Narcissa, but his school nemesis's mother had instead purchased him a forearm holster for the wand he'd soon be getting. Curiouser and curiouser.

Later that day, after the party was over and only the Potters - and Dora - remained at the house, Harry received an owl from Hogwarts inviting him to attend and faked jumping for joy and all the other antics he figured were probably appropriate for a kid his physical

age. Like there'd been any doubt he'd be attending his parents' alma mater. His mother's smile seemed a bit strained, and it took him a moment to realize why: her first child was leaving the nest, even if it was only for ten months at a time. It had to be hard for her.

Unsurprisingly, Harry received a visitor that evening while reading in bed: his mother. He ignored her opening the door to check on him, used to her making the rounds each night, but when she entered his room and sat on the end of his bed, he put a bookmark in to save his place and dropped his book onto the nightstand. "Harry?"

"Yes, Mum?"

Lily leaned over, wrapping her arms around him. "Harry honey, I'm going to miss you when you go off to Hogwarts."

Oh bugger, she was sniffing. Harry hated crying women. Patting her on the back, he tried to make a joke. "No, you're just going to miss the chocolate chip muffins I bake for breakfast once a week." Lily let out a watery chuckle. "And bacon that's not burnt on one end."

"How do you do that, anyways?" Lily let go of him, using her wand to conjure up a handkerchief and wipe her eyes.

Harry shrugged, a small grin on his lips. "That one burner's not working quite right. The heat's not even so unless you move the bacon around while it's cooking, there's one part that gets cooked more than the rest. You might wanna get that looked at."

That made her stop and blink for a moment. Likely she wasn't even aware magical stoves could be imperfect. Unlike muggle technology, the fact that wizarding appliances ran on magic generally meant that it either worked... or it didn't. Stoves were one of the few things Harry could think of that could keep working, albeit not working right, as time went on. "Oh. I'll tell your father to have someone come and check it out. Thanks, Harry." She sighed, ruffling his hair. "You're turning into such a little genius. Just like me. Thank God; I was worried you'd turn out like your father."

That caught Harry's attention; it was the first time he'd ever heard one parent speak ill of the other to any degree. "Oh?"

"I don't want to speak badly of your father... but he wasn't the best person when he was back in school. He liked to prank people, make fun of them... he was a bully, Harry." Lily sighed, leaning back and staring up at the ceiling. "He grew out of it, of course, and I fell in love with him and we married, but the way you were acting, it was like him all over again. I'm so glad you've started growing up already, instead of taking until sixth year like he did."

Harry just shrugged; he honestly couldn't see himself as a bully after growing up under Dudley's fist and so she was essentially thanking him for being himself instead of the son she'd given birth to. "I'll do my best. I mean, Dad may have a big important job and all, but you're the one who does the real hard work. I can't imagine having a better role model for who I'd want to be when I grow up than you, Mum."

A moment later, Harry regretted that as his mother teared up again and pulled him into a hug, crying on his shoulder.

Joe's Note: Removed some more of the creepy mom lusting that SilverAegis wrote into the original, because... eww. That and without the Ginny obsession here, it's pretty irrelevant. Also, I'm sorry, your eleven-year-old whips out a knife, 'no mom, it's a dagger!' - as if that's any better - and it not only rates no further discussion but no punishment? Yeah, that's gone too. Oh, and since someone will probably notice and say something... Lily and James were given different wands on purpose. It has to do with their canon birthdays and the system that JKR used for the main characters. I use it across all my characters; Narcissa, Dora, and other canon characters without known birthdays, I use the birthday of the person who plays them. And as always, I encourage you to read 'n review, especially regarding my Mandarin. It's all from Google Translate, so it's probably horrible.

When Harry woke up early the next morning, he felt someone warm lying next to him. Opening his eyes, he blinked and tried to process what he was seeing. A redhead was lying in bed with him... Ginny? Had he gotten sucked back into his old universe and found by his stalker, who'd decided to take some liberties with his unconscious body figuring she'd never have another chance? Or slid through time and space again to another new universe where he had no taste and actually was with Ginny? Then he wandlessly summoned his glasses and put them on, the fuzzy world snapping into crystal clarity.

Oh. It was his mother. Right, last night had ended with the talking, then the crying, then more talking until she ended up running out of energy and falling asleep in his bed. Wow, the fact that he'd made that particular association added a whole new dimension of creepy to any thoughts involving him and Ginny in a romantic relationship. Then again, even if he was a hair Oedipal - which he most definitely was not - but on the off chance that he turned out to be... did it really matter? As long as he didn't go killing his father or actually shagging his mother, everything was fine, right?

...yeah, no thanks.

Sneaking out of bed was a bit more difficult than he anticipated owing to his smaller body, but eventually he succeeded and made his way down to the kitchen to start breakfast. Today he was going to Diagon Alley to get his supplies. He'd tried to talk his parents into letting him go alone, but alas it was not to be. Which was

understandable; they thought he was an eleven-year-old with little practical magical knowledge and no way to defend himself. Still, he knew Ollivander's was going to cause problems for him and Harry wished he could make at least that part of the trip alone.

At least it would just be him and his mother. His father was - surprise surprise - working, and Lily was trusting the twins to stay out of trouble or, failing that, Dora was home on a study day and would be in her room if something catastrophic happened. After all, with only him going off to Hogwarts this year, it didn't make sense to turn the shopping trip into a family outing. It worked out better for Harry that way; he was a lot closer to his mother than his father and if anything odd happened, she'd be a lot easier to talk into hiding his secrets, even from James. After all, she was keeping secrets of her own from him...

As he trooped down the steps, Harry realized that his case of mistaken identity that morning was the first time he'd thought of anyone from his old universe since his arrival. The more he thought about it, though, the more sense it made. He had no real idea how he'd gotten here, much less how to get back home, and would soon be starting school all over again with the people he'd once known. Sure they wouldn't be the same versions he'd once known but they'd be close enough and granted he'd never see the old ones again... why go on mourning their absence? Not that there were many people he genuinely missed. Plus this world had living versions of a number of people who were gone in his world. Lily, Sirius, Remus, Tonks... Hannah, Neville, Daphne, and Luna presumably. That more than made up for the loss of Su in his mind.

Harry was snapped out of his thoughts when his mother kissed him on the cheek, joining him at the stove as he prepared breakfast for the family. Now that he was helping most mornings as well as pitching in with the other two meals every now and again, his sisters were getting off easy and were quite happy about the fact. He didn't mind, though. It gave him plenty of time to spend with his mother and it cut down on the overall amount of whining in the house now that they weren't being forced to cook against their will. The amount of burnt food making it to the kitchen table had also decreased markedly since he'd replaced them as Lily's primary kitchen helper. Whether they actually lacked domestic skills and his parents were too stubborn to let them stop or it was a passive-aggressive attack for being forced to do something they disliked, Harry wasn't sure.

But whatever the reason, burnt food was still burnt and he was glad he didn't have to eat it anymore.

When they were done, they moved the food to the kitchen table and Harry went for the door, intending to go wake up his dad and siblings. "Harry." He stopped, looking back at his mother, who shook her head. "We're going to eat without them and leave early. Sooner we're there, sooner we'll be done and back, yeah?"

Made sense. Harry murmured his assent and sat down at the table, quickly assembling a plate of food and getting to work on it. The more time he spent with her, the more he was sure that Hermione had somehow managed to possess a redheaded body and come back in time. Lily reminded him of Hermione before the final battle... or maybe it should be the other way around. Both were smart, strict when they needed to be, kind when they didn't, and overbearing in a protective, motherly way. Granted his mother was a bit more outgoing and creative than Hermione, but they were still very similar. Maybe that's why he was so drawn to Lily in this time and place? Or maybe it was why he'd befriended Hermione in his native reality? Chicken or the egg? Egg or the chicken?

After they finished eating breakfast, Lily cast Stasis Charms over the remainder of the food to keep it hot and fresh for the others before leading Harry towards the fireplace. "I figured it didn't make sense for us to wait for them. Sooner we're there, sooner we're done and back. And no offense, but as much as I want to do this with you, I don't trust the girls to behave themselves all day long. So I figure we'll do your shopping, hit... the Leaky Cauldron!" Throwing floo powder into the fire, Lily disappeared in a flash of green flames and Harry followed suit, stumbling out upon arrival in London but managing to stay mostly upright. "...the Leaky Cauldron for lunch, and then you can sort everything out while I clean up whatever messes the girls have made and chew out Dora for not keeping them in line since she's home for a study day."

Nobody reacted apart from a simple nod of Tom's head, which was a novel experience for Harry. Ever since his first visit to the wizarding world with Hagrid, he'd been mobbed most anywhere he went. Well, except for fifth year, but that didn't count because the Ministry had turned the population against him. But now... nobody knew who he was. Nobody cared. It was bloody awesome, to borrow one of Ron's favorites.

Their first stop after entering Diagon Alley was Gringotts, much to Harry's displeasure. Unfortunately, he couldn't articulate why he was so ill at ease around the goblins without sharing his entire story with his mother and that just wasn't happening, at least not any time soon. But after watching the goblins side with Voldemort in an attempt to gain more rights than the Ministry was willing to give them, Harry could barely resist the urge to start throwing hexes as his mother led him to the teller's counter, then down to their vault in one of the carts.

Humanity had ultimately gotten the last laugh, though. The Order of the Phoenix, lead by Dumbledore and Harry himself, had decided to drop by and show the goblins the error of their ways. While their wards had held out for two days, as the goblins waited desperately for reinforcements from their Dark Lord, Luna had ultimately been the downfall of Gringotts. She'd floored to remind Harry that he was missing their six month anniversary, images of what he should have been doing instead of laying siege to goblins had popped into his head, and one almighty burst of power from his holly wand had brought the wards crashing down, killing a number of goblins who had tied their magical cores to said wards.

The goblins had then surrendered to the Ministry.

It was decidedly odd to see people actually in Gringotts again. After the betrayal, siege, and reclamation of the sole wizarding bank, most people had withdrawn their money. While the economy hadn't collapsed entirely, since people still had to go to work and pay for items and services rendered, it had taken a major hit as credit, loans, and other complex forms of finance ceased to exist. As they exited into the bright sunlight, Harry put it out of his mind. That had never happened here and, unless he seriously screwed something up, never would.

Although sometimes walking past stores would conjure up memories of the past, like the currently empty storefront that would someday house Fred and George's dream, Harry mostly managed to keep his mind on the present, thanks largely in part to his mother. Who would have thought that shopping could actually be somewhat fun? His first time around had been, but second year was marred by the Malfoys and the Lockhart incident, third year by having to look over his shoulder for Sirius Black, and after that, the specter of

Voldemort's second rise had hung over public areas like a dark cloud the few times he had been able to escape Grimmauld Place.

Their first stop was Madam Malkin's for his school robes and some other new clothes to fit his taller but slimmer figure that he could wear on nights and weekends. Shopping for new clothes was something he hadn't found too enjoyable the few times he'd gotten to do it, but being fitted and picking out clothes was a lot more fun with his mother there to tease him and make suggestions. It was definitely a far different experience than his last shopping trip with a companion, where the Weasleys had been forced to sit there and watch him be fitted for new clothes, Ron sulking all the while, before heading to the second-hand store themselves.

Actually, that had been his second to last trip with company. The last had been a good deal more fun, at least until Madam Malkin had thrown him and Luna out of her store after catching them snogging in one of her changing rooms.

It was while he was in Madam Malkin's that Harry saw one of the first connections to his old world, or rather his first connection with the Hogwarts of his old world. After picking out a few outfits he wanted in addition to the school uniform he'd need to wear to class, Harry was led back to a corner of the store with platforms for measuring the patrons and making the necessary adjustments to their purchases. All three spots were occupied, though, with three very familiar faces.

Well, two very familiar faces and one fairly familiar one. He'd never seen Parvati sneer quite like that in his original world, much less at her own sister. "Can't believe our parents still can't tell us apart even after ten years. Oh well. Sucks to be you, I suppose. Hope you enjoy being grounded for a week, bookworm."

Rolling her eyes, Padma kept her arms out from her sides as one of Malkin's assistants adjusted her black Hogwarts robe. "Whatever you say, sister. Just make sure you return the clothes you borrowed from my dresser, or I'll start trying out human transfiguration on you and let Father clean up the mess. I like that sweater." Sighing, Padma shook her head. "One of these days, maybe you'll figure out that negative attention isn't better than no attention at all."

"Nagging bore."

"Attention seeking brat."

Huh. That was interesting. While Harry was very well aware that Padma and Parvati were different people, he'd never seen them being openly antagonistic to each other. A bemused disinterest at most; Padma preferring the less 'wooly' subjects like Ancient Runes and Arithmancy instead of her sister's predilection for Divination, while Parvati wasn't too impressed with her sister's overly studious behavior. Still, they at least got along most of the time. These two weren't quite at him and Draco levels of enmity, but they definitely didn't seem friendly to him either.

The third and closest of the fitting platforms was occupied by Li Su, who stood there stoically as the Patil twins sniped at each other next to her and the seamstress adjusted the hemline of one of her black uniform skirts. Black? That was new, he realized, looking down at the slacks that were draped over his arm. He hadn't even noticed at the time, but here it seemed the uniforms were white and black instead of white and gray. Both genders wore a white button front shirt, black vest, and a tie that was being sold black but Harry guessed would shift to match the student's house colors after they were sorted. The boys' section had offered both black slacks and short trousers, while the only option available to girls were black knee-length skirts. Harry also remembered seeing a display at the front of the store that featured stockings, tights, and knee socks - all in black - and was willing to bet good money that the girls were not only required to wear one of the three but that they would take on the girl's house colors as well. Which was nice. The grey uniforms were just so... drab.

Eyes wandering back to Su, Harry stared at her as he debated whether or not to approach her. While she hadn't occupied a position in his inner circle of friends, at least until after everything had fallen apart and she'd become his only friend, she'd been in the intermediate ring: members of the DA he was closer to than the average student. And while he hadn't made her acquaintance until sixth year originally, there was nothing saying he couldn't change that this time around.

Harry knew he had an incredible advantage over his peers when it came to making friends: he knew roughly how people were going to turn out as they got older and so he didn't have to worry about

attaching himself to someone who seemed interesting in the here and now but would turn out to hurt him in the end. Or at least theoretically he did. Eyeing the Patil twins, Harry had to admit that his knowledge might not be entirely accurate in this new world.

In Su's case, Harry knew the future her was extremely bright even for a girl from the house of that valued intelligence, and whose lack of success in Hogwarts's three wanded subjects had easily been reversed under Harry's 'stop thinking and make it happen' tutoring program. She was also a treasure trove of information from her homeland, ranging from Mandarin - which he really did want to continue learning, come to think of it - to the foreign magic she'd unleashed upon the Death Eaters in the several battles she'd participated in to the tai chi she'd coaxed Harry into trying... at which point they'd quickly discovered that he had absolutely no aptitude for it. And - unless things turned out completely differently here - she'd grown into a bloody gorgeous young woman to boot. She was like Cho without the waterworks, and with a quicker mind, more potent wand, and plumper rear. There was much she could teach him and he could offer her tutoring in any or all Hogwarts subjects as compensation. It presented a win-win situation for both of them. He learned, she learned... and she'd provide some pretty damn good scenery for him to enjoy once they reached a certain age. Win-win-win?

Mind made up, Harry took a step forward and waited for her to look over at him before smiling. He had to fight to keep from reacting, though, as their gazes locked and Harry found himself staring into brilliant violet eyes instead of the brown, verging on black orbs he'd been expecting. After a second, he shrugged it off. Parvati was brattier than usual here, Dora was an orphan who lived in his house, his godfather had a wife and a daughter, and he had two sisters. Su having purple eyes really wasn't that big of a difference, all things considered. "Hi. I'm Harry Potter. You going into your first year at Hogwarts too?"

Su nodded, looking over at the Patil twins before jerking her head towards the empty space on the other side of her. Harry sidled up beside her and she lowered her voice. "Thank Merlin, someone in my year with at least a tiny bit of courtesy. My mother would tan my hide if I was behaving like that in public. Family problems are supposed to stay in the family, not get spread around for everyone to hear. I'm Li Su. Call me Su, because..."

"In China, the family name comes before the given name." Su's eyes widened and Harry grinned. "How about you don't assume all British wizards are the same and I won't ask you if you like eating sushi or what the weather's like near the Korean Academy."

Leaning her head back, Su let out the first real laugh Harry had heard from her in either world. "Oh, I think I'm going to like you, Harry Potter. Deal. Now, what house do you think you're going to be in? I've spent most of my life traveling with my parents and now that I'm back in Britain for school, it seems like it's all kids can talk about..."

Harry bit his lip uncertainly as his mind raced; he knew that Su was supposed to end up in Ravenclaw and his words could influence her, sending her to another house the way Hagrid and Ron had influenced him by instilling a distaste for Slytherin that Malfoy only reinforced. But... well, he could have a little fun with it. "Let's just say I'm glad M comes before P in the alphabet. There's a certain someone I don't want to deal with and anywhere he's not is fine with me."

"Ah. You're doubly lucky." Harry raised an eyebrow and Su jerked her head towards the twins. "L comes before P, but P-o comes after P-a."

That made Harry wince. Not that being after them would be worth much; assuming the sorting went similarly, he was probably cursed to share a house with the bitchier of the twins again. Although Su might be luckier than she thought, he realized. "Just out of curiosity... was your letter addressed to Li Su or Su Li?"

"Li Su." Su didn't seem to get why he'd asked at first, and then understanding dawned. "Yours wasn't to Potter Harry, was it?"

Grinning, Harry shook his head before looking in the direction of the Patil twins. "Nope. And last time I checked, S comes after P. What the school doesn't know until after you tell your new Head of House won't hurt them, will it?"

Su let loose with another laugh and Harry decided he'd have to try and make her laugh as often as possible; it was a lovely sound. "So, new subject... where are you from? I'm from Harwich, up in Essex."

"Perranarworthal. Down in Cornwall. It's like Harwich, up in Essex, except warmer and dryer."

"Where now?" Su tried mouthing the name a few times before giving up and shaking her head. "I'm hoping that's not one of the coastal towns in Cornwall my parents have been talking about expanding into. Do you know how many hànzì it'd take to write that out?"

That made him chuckle and then the two lapsed into silence for a moment before something vitally important occurred to Harry. He was assuming Su could continue his lessons but, as the twins had shown him, not everyone was the same in this universe. So why was he assuming that she'd be the same as 'his' Su? On the other hand, how could he ask her what languages she knew or if she practiced tai chi or if she whether or not she knew any traditional Chinese magic without seeming... well, weird? Then the problem solved itself for him as Su sent another narrow-eyed look over at the Patil twins. "Xīwàng tāmen zài tóngyī suǒ fángzi. Wǒ nìngyuàn bǐ zhīyǒu liǎng sān gè xuǎnzé."

Harry frowned as he did his best to sort out her comments. She... wanted the twins in one house so she'd have more choices? He thought? As he mentally double-checked his translation, he replied without thinking. "Twins tend to go into the same house at Hogwarts, so you'll probably get lucky there."

"Nǐ huì shuō zhōngwén ma?"

Harry nodded before realizing that he'd screwed up not once but twice in thirty seconds and abruptly paling. "Oh bugger." Looking around, he spotted his mother across the store and leaned in so he could talk to Su without being overheard. "Listen, I need you to forget what I just said." She looked at him oddly and he winced. "I'm an eleven-year-old half-blood from Cornwall. Yes, I do speak Mandarin - well, some that is - but I'm not supposed to be able to. It'll raise questions. Awkward questions."

Staring at him with those odd violet eyes, Su eventually nodded. "Right now, I'm wearing something that I stole from my mother. And it's worth about as much as you're going to be spending on school supplies this year. Maybe more." Harry raised an eyebrow and Su discreetly pointed out a middle aged Chinese woman in exotic red

and gold robes browsing near his own mother. "I know something you don't want people to know. You know something I don't want people to know. We hold and protect the other's secret and maybe someday you'll tell me what you're hiding and I'll tell you what I'm hiding."

Behind Harry someone cleared their throat and he grimaced before stepping away again so the seamstress could finish her work on Su's skirt. "You know, you're definitely smarter than the average first year. Or at least the other first years I've met so far."

"You don't say?" Su shot a pointed look at where an Indian woman was dragging both Patil twins from the store as she barked at them harshly in Hindi. "Guess this means we're headed for Ravenclaw, then. Although I have to wonder... if at least a quarter of our classmates aren't as smart as us, are we going to get the best of a bad lot or will there be more Gryffindors, Hufflepuffs, and Slytherins than Ravenclaws this year?"

Probably the former, Harry thought, but he could hardly relate his own experiences at Hogwarts with his perfectly allocated class of twenty boys and twenty girls that were broken into five a piece over four houses. "Don't know. But as long as we're in the same house, zhìshǎo wǒ de yǒurén zài wǒ de kǒuyīn yǔ."

Su winced. "Oh sweet Merlin, you're right. That accent does need work." She shook her head in dismay. "I never thought the language of my homeland could sound so ugly until I met my first Englishman."

"On behalf of my countrymen... ouch?"

Half an hour later Su was done and gone, having extracted a promise from him to send the family's owl Silver Star her way with a letter so they could continue their conversation, and Harry had then gone on to endure his mother's teasing about his 'new girlfriend' through the entire measuring session. From there, they'd filled out all the forms so the right garments would be tailored and owled to the house, and then - when his mother wasn't looking - Harry had added five black satchels with very specific requirements to the order with the option to purchase more in the future.

As he held the door open for Lily as she exited Madam Malkin's, mentally debating where they should go next, Harry ran into another familiar face. It was Neville with two vaguely familiar figures who he could only assume were the healthy versions of Frank and Alice Longbottom. Instead of the meek boy he had seen in his first year at Hogwarts, though, this one seemed stuck up and spoiled. Almost... Draco Malfoy, he realized. This Neville reminded him of Draco.

Neville passed in front of them, whining about how first years weren't allowed to bring brooms to Hogwarts, and Harry watched as his mother exchanged looks with Neville's parents. Unfriendly looks. Interesting. As soon as they were out of earshot, Harry tugged on the sleeve of his mother's robes. "So, that was the Boy-Who-Lived. Huh. Chubby little ponce." Lily let out a snort of laughter and Harry discreetly gestured to the departing trio. "So, what did they do to us?"

"How..?"

"I heard you muttering about wanting to kill them, for one." Harry grinned before mimicking the glare his mother had just shot at Alice Longbottom. "There was also that."

His mother sighed and gave him a wry grin. "You know, I'm starting to miss the days back when you weren't so smart and perceptive. Alright, well, I used to like them. Alice and I were actually really good friends before that fateful Halloween, and your father and Frank got on well enough. Then their son became the Boy-Who-Lived and suddenly they're acting like the world should bow down and kiss their feet. Frank almost got your father demoted at work because he wanted to be an auror captain too, but luckily Alastor Moody was retiring and a position opened up. And Alice decided I wasn't good enough to spend time with anymore, since she could spend her days having tea parties and gossiping with society's elite. Quit her job as an auror and everything so she could. They used to be such nice people, but now... they're practically the Malfoys."

"But you like the Malfoys."

"No, I like two Malfoys. Lucius can go rot for all I care."

Even as he was filing away the information about Tara being a Malfoy - his mother had said two, after all, and he hadn't seen

another platinum blonde person visiting the house - Harry found himself revising his plans for the future. So much for his idea of helping Neville beat Voldemort. Even if Neville was the savior of the wizarding world - or the one supposed to be - Harry didn't think he'd be able to work with someone so similar to his former school nemesis. Maybe he could destroy the horcruxes on his own and then find a way to remove Voldemort without Neville's help? There was plenty of time to think about that, though. He couldn't make a move until Voldemort was back in a physical body he could destroy... and couldn't exactly go horcrux hunting as an eleven-year-old with parents who were watching over him.

Harry grabbed his mother's hand, leading her over to Magical Menagerie. As much as he loved Hedwig, he wasn't sure he'd be able to handle having an owl that was his and yet not all over again. So he figured a trip to look at the other pets was in order, to see if something caught his eye. Alas, though, he realized a flaw in his plan as he went from tank to cage to basket, looking over the different animals. He definitely wasn't a toad person. Rats reminded him of Pettigrew. And cats were cute and all, but not for him either. Hmm. So an owl it was, evidently. Then he realized something. "Mum? Can we go back to the Leaky Cauldron and have Jasmine or Rose floo over? Maybe both?"

"I'm not sure they're awake and dressed yet, sweetie." Lily furrowed her brow, most likely trying to figure out the reasoning behind his request. "Why?"

Gesturing to the pets around him, Harry sighed. "None of the first year pets really seem to fit me. I thought we could ask my sisters if one of them wanted an owl. They pick out the owl, I take it to Hogwarts this year, and next year they can have the owl back and I can get a better pet." Lily opened her mouth but Harry cut her off. "In Hogwarts, A History, it says second years and above can have any pet that isn't a threat to the safety of their fellow students."

Lily just beamed at him. "You're so smart. I didn't find that one out until fourth year and that was only because a prefect told me. Alright, let's go see if your sisters have decided to crawl out of bed yet."

In the end, irony was a cruel mistress. Jasmine had come through the floo to the Leaky Cauldron and joined them for a trip to Eeylops Owl Emporium, only to come out a few minutes later... with Hedwig.

The owl eyed him balefully, as if to say 'Why aren't you buying me, stupid boy?'. Thankfully, though, Jasmine was in a hurry to show off her new pet and disappeared back through the floo to Perranarworthal, and Harry and Lily went back to their shopping. After a quick visit to Slug & Jiggers Apothecary to pick up a cauldron, scales, and ingredients, Harry was left needing only his schoolbooks and a wand. "Mum? Can I use your schoolbooks? They're all the same, right?"

"I... think so, yes." Lily gave him an odd look for the question. "Why? It's not like we need to save money."

Harry didn't want to go with the truth, which was that he was hoping for a repeat of the Half-Blood Prince incident and was only starting now so his mother wouldn't get suspicious, which she probably would if he waited until fifth or sixth year to demand her books in hopes of finding tips and new spells. So instead, he decided to try something a bit sappier. "Well this is going to be the first time I'm leaving the house for more than a few days. It'll help me feel close to you while I'm at school. And... well, I bet Dad probably drew all over his or something."

Throwing her arms around him, his mother sniffled and hugged him tight. "That's so sweet, Harry. Of course you can use my books. I still have all seven years in my trunk in the attic, so we'll be set unless they change the course requirements. We can still visit Flourish and Blotts, though, to see if there's anything you find interesting. But for now, let's see if we can find you a wand, okay?"

As much as he wasn't looking forward to this, Harry nodded and the two trooped down the alley to Ollivander's. Just as they arrived, the Longbottoms exited looking grim, Neville staring down at a very familiar wand with an odd look on his face. Harry sighed. So much for him getting his old holly and phoenix feather wand back. That ought to make the shopping experience interesting, to say the least.

Their entrance was marked by a tinkling bell that rang somewhere in the depths of the shop and as Harry wandered towards the front counter, Lily waved her wand over the single, spindly chair against the wall, transfiguring it into something sturdier and more comfortable. A strange tingle of magic - almost like occlumency or Anastasiya's veela allure - prickled against the back of his neck and Harry whirled around. "Mister Ollivander."

"Good morning. I thought I'd be seeing you soon, Harry Potter." It wasn't a question, but then Harry wasn't really expecting it to be. He'd already been through this once with the strange old man. Granted what wand he walked away with would be different this time, but the basic encounter would likely be quite similar. As he slipped past Harry, Ollivander glanced over at Lily. "You have your mother's eyes. It seems only yesterday she was in here herself, buying her first wand. Ten and a quarter inches long, made of rowan. A very nice wand for those adept at charms, although describing her as merely 'adept' would be quite the insult. Your father, on the other hand, favored an alder wand. Eleven inches. Pliable. A little more power and excellent for transfiguration. Well, I say your father favored it - it's really the wand that chooses the wizard, of course."

Harry nodded; he'd seen it more than a few times during the war, when witches and wizards on both sides had died due to miscast shields, having picked up the wrong wand after being disarmed. Not to mention the Elder Wand... "What about Nymphadora Black?" Ollivander looked at him oddly and Harry shrugged. "Just a bit curious. I've seen what my cousin can do with her wand and it's bloody wicked."

Tilting his head to one side, Ollivander stared off into space for a moment before responding to Harry's question. "Ten inches long, made of *Thuja occidentalis* - it doesn't have any one common name and the ones it does have are rather forgettable - and rather unyielding. A bit like Miss Black herself, dare I say. But shall we save further wandering down memory lane for after we've found the right wand for you, Mister Potter? Which is your wand arm?" He'd been trained to use either hand by his dueling instructors, but volunteered his right hand just to avoid any awkward questions. "Hold out your arm. That's it." He measured Harry from shoulder to finger, then wrist to elbow, shoulder to floor, knee to armpit and round his head. As he worked, he launched into what Harry assumed was a standard speech. "Every Ollivander wand has a core of a powerful magical substance, Mister Potter. We use unicorn hairs, phoenix tail feathers, and the heartstrings of dragons. No two Ollivander wands are the same, just as no two unicorns, dragons, or phoenixes are quite the same. And of course, you will never get such good results with another wizard's wand." By now, Ollivander was wandering around behind the counter, flitting among the shelves as he gathered wand boxes, the tape measure still working

away. "That will do." The tape measure crumpled into a heap on the floor and Ollivander gestured for Harry to approach the counter. "Right then, Mister Potter. Try this one. Beechwood and dragon heartstring. Nine inches. Nice and flexible. Just take it and give it a wave."

Taking the proffered wand from Ollivander, Harry gave it a short wave. Before he could do anything else, Ollivander snatched it out of his hand and it was only his memories of his last time wand shopping that kept Harry from lashing out against the quick, grabby hands. Before he could say anything, a new wand was shoved into his hand. "Maple and phoenix feather. Seven inches. Quite whippy. Try..." Harry went to wave the wand but he had hardly raised it when it too was snatched back by Ollivander. "No, no... here, ebony and unicorn hair, eight and a half inches, springy. Go on, go on, try it out."

Harry tried. And tried. If he hadn't lived through this once already, he was pretty sure he would have been getting more and more nervous as the pile of tried wands grew taller and taller on the counter. Actually, he was starting to get nervous. Neville already had 'his' wand. If it was gone, what was left in the store that would match well with him? Just like the first time around, though, the more wands Ollivander pulled from the shelves to try, the happier he seemed to become. "Tricky customer, eh? Not to worry, I haven't turned a customer away in all the years I've run this store and you won't be the first. The perfect match is here somewhere." Suddenly, he paused and gave Harry a long, considering look. "I wonder..."

As Ollivander disappeared into the back, Harry shot his bored looking mother a helpless shrug before peering down the aisle, wondering what was going on. Had Fawkes donated a third feather? Maybe Voldemort preferred to dual-wield wands and there was a second pair of 'brother wands' that he was about to receive a member of? Ollivander eventually returned bearing a pitch black box with red markings, similar to the box his original wand had come in and yet completely different. "While most of my wands are made from a very narrow variety of cores, sometimes I enjoy dabbling with other materials just for the challenge of it. I have had few successes and even fewer of them have sold... but perhaps you will change that for me, Mister Potter."

Nodding, Harry waited for Ollivander to open the box and then reached inside to grasp the wand it held. Holly, or at least what looked like it, and if it wasn't the same length as his original wand, it was damn close. One hell of a coincidence, but if it gave him a working wand without resorting to robbing Neville Longbottom, Harry supposed he couldn't complain. "What is it?"

"Eleven inches, holly and a core of..." Ollivander trailed off and winced. Harry arched a brow at that; if the wandmaker was reluctant to divulge the wand's core, it couldn't possibly be good. "With a core of thestral hair." And look, he'd been right. He had a piece of creepy skeletal horse in his wand.

Lily didn't seem any more thrilled with the prospect. "What happened, sir, were you all out of elder at the time?" Ollivander opened his mouth, perhaps to offer up a wand made of the wood in question, before taking a step backwards as the redhead advanced towards him. "It might be time to turn the store over to your heir because if you think handing out your attempts at Deathsticks to first years is a good idea, you've clearly gone senile!"

Her voice climbing with each word, Lily was shouting by the end and Harry smoothly slipped between the two adults as he attempted to defuse the situation. "Mum, I need a wand. Look how many I've tried so far. Why don't we see if it works for me and then we can worry about any strange quirks it might have?"

"An excellent idea. And I assure you, Lady Potter, while my dabblings were rooted in the myths surrounding the Elder Wand, I never did find a way to replicate its supposed qualities." Ollivander paused and tilted his head to one side. "At least I think I haven't. Somehow, I doubt you would let me take young Mister Potter's wand from him - assuming it accepts him - and throw curses at him." Lily shook her head vehemently and Ollivander turned his attention back to the man - or rather boy - of the hour. "Give it a wave, Mister Potter."

Taking a few steps back from the counter just to be safe, Harry pointed the wand up into the air and decided to nonverbally conjure up some bluebell flames. It would be a more controlled test than just blindly channeling some magic through the wand, he reasoned, but if something happened to go wrong, he wouldn't burn down the shop or anything. The spell came to life properly, creating a small ball of

blue flames... and then promptly surged skyward in a torrent of blue flames that tore through the roof.

Letting out a few choice words that would probably get his mouth washed out if his mother wasn't busy shielding herself from fiery debris, Harry cancelled the spell and dove backwards just in time for a piece of charred wood to drop to the floor where he'd just been standing. After taking a few deep breaths to calm himself, Harry rose to his feet and blew on the end of his wand before meeting his mother's wide-eyed gaze of disbelief. "Well, at least we finally found a wand that likes me." Stepping forward, he peered up through the hole in the ceiling of Ollivander's. "Although I don't think we took enough gold out of the vault to pay for that..."

As the door shut behind his now-satisfied customers, Ollivander stared up at the hole in his ceiling incredulously. He'd seen a lot of destruction in his many years of fitting wands to customers who had practically no magical control, but this... this took the cake. Sighing, he conjured a temporary magical seal in case it started raining. He'd contact Gringotts at the end of the day to have the goblins come repair and reinforce the building.

What an oh-so-interesting day. Not only had he sold the brother wand to young Tom Riddle's now infamous yew wand, but he'd sold one of his own special wands as well. Heading to the rear of his shop, he sat down at his desk and contemplated a piece of parchment. Dumbledore would need to know about the Longbottom boy having that particular wand... but what of young Potter?

After a long minute, he shook his head. No, Dumbledore didn't need to know about Harry Potter and his wand until he found out about it himself. While Ollivander had no doubt the young man was headed for great things, he wanted them to be the great things the boy himself wanted... not the great things that Dumbledore guided him into thinking he should do.

And if Dumbledore eventually found out about young Mister Potter and couldn't resist the urge to meddle in his life... Ollivander fervently hoped that he actually succeeded this time. The last thing the wizarding world needed was another Tom Riddle.

Joe's Note: I know the second scene is a bit of an infodump but, while it's not critical per say, it does serve a purpose. Oh, and people? If you're going to leave an anonymous review, can you leave an email if you're going to ask questions? Because it makes it rather impossible to reply if you don't.

After leaving Ollivander's, Harry noticed his mother was strangely silent as they made their way to Flourish and Blotts. "Mum?" She made a vaguely inquisitive noise, reminding him a bit of how he handled Hermione in those last days before coming to this world. Maybe that's where he got it from? "I'm still Harry, you know. I just have a... well, a bloody awesome wand."

"Language, Harry." Lily stopped for a moment and sighed before turning and hugging him tightly. "I know you are, sweetie. It's just... I know I read The Tales of Beedle the Bard to you when you were younger. You know the legends about the Elder Wand. And now you're walking around with a miniature version of it. That's not what I was expecting when we stepped into the store. I mean... I have a galleon bet with your father as to whether you'll get a charms-friendly wand like mine or a transfiguration-oriented one like his. How am I going to explain that monstrosity?"

Harry held his wand up and grinned, wandlessly creating a tiny ball of flame at the end rather than attempting another proper casting. The last thing he needed was a group of aurors being called to Diagon Alley because an auror captain's son had torched a store or two because he couldn't control his magic. "Simple. Bluebell flames. Tell him it's a charms wand and if he won't give you the galleon, I'll poke him with this until he does. We can split the take fifty-fifty."

That suggestion made Lily pause. "You know, just when I think you're turning out to be just like me, you say something that reminds me so much of your father it's scary." Then she grinned. "And deal. Now let's go buy some books."

Upon entering the store, Lily headed for the charms section while he instinctively went for the Defense books. With his newfound bookworm reputation, Harry figured that if he got an advanced book or two, he could get away with using at least some of the spells he knew by the end of first year or maybe the summer after. And who

knew, maybe this dimension might even have a book or two he'd never read before.

Harry was glad that his parents provided him with four galleons a week in allowance, allowing him to buy a pair of books on his own before his mother made it up to the counter. The rest of his selections became a pile next to hers on the counter and as the clerk rang up their purchases, Harry covertly shrank the two he'd already purchased and slid them into his pocket. The two-dozen new books were bagged and shrunk by the clerk and then, after a quick stop to pick up parchment and quills, the pair returned to the Leaky Cauldron so they could floo back home, lunch forgotten thanks to the delay at Ollivander's.

Upon their return through the floo, his mother abruptly murmured a destination he didn't hear and disappeared back into the emerald flames. Shrugging, Harry made his way up the stairs to his room, where he got to work restoring his various purchases to their full size so he could sort through his new belongings. He quickly came to the conclusion that he needed somewhere to stash them if he wanted use of his bed between now and September 1st, and there was nowhere suitable in his room.

That resulted in a quick trek to the attic, where judicious application of the modified Four-Point Spell helped him track down two separate trunks with his mother's name on them, one of which also responded to his requests to be pointed at 'Lily Evans's schoolbooks'. After a moment's indecision - the trunk without the books was bigger and sturdier looking - he opened both and used a quick spell to swap the contents. Lifting the book-filled trunk with one idle flick of his wand, he floated it back downstairs and into his room, unloading the unneeded books onto the shelves he'd gotten his mother to add to his room. That cleared up plenty of room for him inside the trunk and he continued to flick his new wand to and fro, deciding it was best to have his belongings packed now rather than waiting until the night of August 31st. That, and he really needed to get back into the habit of using a wand as opposed to his wandless abilities. And he needed to get used to his new wand as soon as possible; if he'd thought his holly and phoenix feather wand was powerful, his new holly and thestral hair wand was like a Firebolt compared to a Cleansweep. For the first time in years, Harry found himself having to actively work to keep from overpowering his spells.

The last thing he needed, after all, was to make something spontaneously combust, explode, or go flying through a wall.

Each of his black robes was folded neatly and packed into the trunk, along with his hat, tie, and a few other odds and ends that hadn't needed to be tailored. The box full of ingredients from the apothecary went inside his cauldron, as did his scales and vials, just to minimize the space they would consume. Casting a critical eye around his room, he flicked his wand and began summoning some of the books he'd want to bring so he could keep reading them without relying on the library at school to have copies. The rest could go in the night before if he hadn't read them by that point.

"Harry James Potter!" A particularly thick text on the history of the Potter family slammed into the side of his head as his mother's voice broke his concentration, making him stagger as it dropped to the floor. Looking over at the doorway, Harry found his mother standing with her hands on her hips, reminding him a great deal of Molly Weasley. "With who your father is, I would think you'd be familiar with the phrase 'Decree for the Reasonable Restriction of Underage Sorcery'. Do you want to get a warning before you even go to school?"

Well at least she'd caught him using his new wand, rather than doing it all wandlessly. That'd be a bloody nightmare to explain. "Mum? Have you ever asked Dad how the Ministry monitors children? Or look into it while you were in school to see if you could get around it?" Lily shook her head slowly and Harry gave a grim smile; he'd been pissed as all hell at the example of institutional discrimination when he'd found out. "I saw it when I was paging through Ten Things You Don't Know About Your Ministry, which is why I had you buy a copy. The Ministry has no way to track the use of any one wand, so they point a sensor at the home of each muggleborn who sends an acceptance letter to Hogwarts. They can't do that for houses with even one magical parent, because then if you used a spell, I'd get a letter. So..."

Lily's eyes went wide before narrowing in anger. "So purebloods and half-bloods get to practice magic all they like, while muggleborn students are forced to only do theoretical work every summer?" Harry nodded. "That's the most ridiculous thing I've ever heard! I'm going to go write a letter to the Daily Prophet and tell the whole world about this injustice!"

With that, she whirled and stomped off down the stairs to points unknown, muttering things under her breath that children were definitely not supposed to learn from their parents. Operation: Distract Mother From Advanced Silent Magic was a success. Harry grinned and made a flicking motion with his wand to close the door. The new wand felt so much like an extension of himself, he didn't even want to use his wandless magic anymore. Idly, he wondered what would have happened if he'd dueled Dumbledore before his death and taken the Elder Wand from him. Was wielding it like this? Even better? And it made Harry wonder... how much of Dumbledore's supposed power was his own and how much came from his wand?

Perhaps someday he could trick this Dumbledore into dueling with him... the Elder Wand would make for a great second wand and a potent secret weapon even if Voldemort was protected from death at Harry's hand by this world's prophecy.

Soon enough, Harry had his new trunk sorted and packed. The golden flower and 'Lily' in cursive script had been removed; he loved his mother dearly but didn't need it to be that obvious a momma's boy. Instead, the lid of the trunk now bore his own name surrounded by a pair of skeletal wings. He liked it; while the tastefully minimal amount of gold said 'wealthy but not a berk about it', the wings just screamed 'badass'. Out of packing related work to do, Harry decided to start jotting down a list of names for his evening project, only to be cut off two-thirds the way through as he heard footsteps ascending the stairs to his floor once more. Closing his journal, he lifted one of his bed's pillows and slid it beneath before summoning a spare book to him so he'd look busy when she arrived. "Alright, done." Looking up from his supposed reading material, Harry watched his mother wave a roll of parchment at him before using it to gesture back over one shoulder. "Want to come help me cook dinner after I send this off?"

Was it dinnertime already? Huh. Well, it had been after lunch when they returned to the house because of the mess at Ollivander's and he'd been up here working for a while. Time flew when one was working hard, evidently. Closing his book, Harry slid off his bed and stretched before grinning. "I suppose. But only if I can use my wand. And I bet you the other half of the galleon bet you have with Dad that he won't notice until I'm hovering the food onto the table."

After pondering that for a moment, his mother grinned. Maybe she was feeling rebellious because she disagreed with the Ministry's policies about underage magic now that she knew about them... or maybe she just wanted him to do more work. Harry wasn't sure. "Deal. And you're on."

Following behind his mother as they left his room behind and descended the stairs to the first floor and then onward to the ground floor, Harry took a quick mental inventory of what proteins were still in the fridge for consumption. There wasn't much, at least not that he could remember. Tomorrow was market day, after all. "Any idea what we're doing for dinner? Grab all the leftovers, throw them in a skillet, and serve up what comes out?"

"No, garbage mayo and garbage pot pie are more Dora's thing than mine." Lily entered the kitchen and crouched down, opening one of the cabinets beneath the island. Rooting around inside, she let out a noise of triumph before reaching up and placing a blue and yellow can on the counter. "You know, James is supposed to be home for once. What do you think we can do with these cans of Spam you picked up last time you went to market? And if you think I don't know where you must have gone to get muggle meat-in-a-can, you're wrong, young man."

Harry held his hands up in surrender and offered up his best attempt at an angelic expression. "In my defense, if they made wizard meat-in-a-can, I wouldn't have to leave the area I'm not supposed to leave to get meat-in-a-can."

"Funny."

"I thought so."

In the end, the Spam became Spam in the Hole, James complained vocally about 'unnatural muggle meat', and Harry ended up winning a galleon that night.

Upon returning to his room that night, Harry retrieved his journal and got back to work on the project his mother's request for cooking assistance had disrupted. Namely, a list of all the students in his year so that when he returned to Hogwarts on September 1st, he would know who to make a concerted effort to get to know. After all,

he knew who these eleven-year-olds would - potentially - grow into as adults. Why not use that information to make slightly more informed decisions than he had the first time around, like he had with Su? Granted some of his information would inevitably be wrong. Neville, for instance. Parvati. But even just having hints to work from would allow him to sink his claws into the real keepers of his year at Hogwarts, while avoiding the ones he was better off not associating with.

With the basic list established, Harry began to sort through the students and cross out those he definitely didn't want to deal with. Gryffindor had five boys in it - four if he didn't count himself - and none of them looked promising. Seamus was just another one of the wizarding world's blind sheep and if Harry ended up sorted into Gryffindor house again, Dean would need to be sacrificed to keep Seamus busy and away from him. Neville was out of the equation for obvious reasons and even if through some strange twist of fate Ron wasn't a jealous, irrational, and dim-witted little boy in this dimension? He wasn't sure he could tolerate Ron's presence for any extended period of time without pummeling him for things that this Ron had yet to do and might never do.

Hmm. Maybe Su was on to something with her idea that the two of them should be sorted into Ravenclaw?

The girls of Gryffindor were likewise utterly uninspiring: Parvati, Lavender, and Hermione. Hermione was unappealing for the same reason as Ron. Parvati and Lavender... intellectually mediocre, loyalty that came and went like the tides, and considering he was planning to avoid Divination this time around, why would he want to invite one of the school's two Mini Trelawneys into his life? Not to mention that this dimension's Parvati seemed like a real bitch.

Ending up in Ravenclaw would be a bit of a crapshoot for him: there were two wizards from the house who had served the Light Side well during the war, but there were also two wizards he knew nothing about and one he wanted nothing to do with. And with his luck, if he got sorted to Ravenclaw then it would be one of the former who got bumped from the dorm to make room for him. The girls, on the other hand, included one he was already befriending, three future Dumbledore's Army members, and one enigma. So yeah,

Ravenclaw was looking like a pretty good idea from where he was sitting.

In Hufflepuff, he faced a similar conundrum as he did with Ravenclaw: four of the five wizards were people he didn't want to associate with, and there was a chance that his being sorted into the house could displace that fifth one. On the other hand, all five of the Hufflepuff girls from his year had been members of the DA who possessed varying levels of power and skill.

Slytherin... actually, there was a slightly smaller chance of him killing one of his dormmates if he ended up in the house of snakes, albeit with a wider range of targets for him to pick from. He couldn't name a Slytherin boy he didn't despise and the prospect of spending seven years in a dorm with Draco Malfoy was loathsome. The girls... Bulstrode and Parkinson were right up there on his 'kill if you think you can get away with it' list, Davis and O'Mochain were dark but neutral, and Daphne Greengrass... Harry winced as he thought back to how they'd first met. While he had no objections to the idea of befriending the fiery Woodbridgian pureblood again, he hoped that if it came to pass that it would be under better circumstances than it had been in his original universe.

There was also the matter of one Tara Malfoy. While he wasn't sure she was in his year - while she did look his age, she could have been a slightly older girl who didn't look her age or a younger girl who looked more mature than she was - he was going to assume she was until he learned otherwise and... where would she go? How would they get along if he was sorted into the same house? What would her brother think or do if they began associating? Would this world's Draco even care about him, seeing as how he wasn't the Boy-Who-Lived here? The original Harry's journal had been rather sparing when it came to details about the blonde; he'd evidently avoided her since she generally only appeared when Cassie was already present and he'd done his best to avoid the half-veela.

Looking over some of the names left on his list, Harry furrowed his brow as a plan began to form. What if he convinced his mother to have Narcissa over for an afternoon and he'd host a tea party for Tara and any friends she wanted to invite over? With him doing the work, she couldn't really complain and it would give her a free afternoon with her friend while he hopefully made a new one. Or more, if he was lucky. Scratching that idea down on a spare piece of

parchment, Harry went back to his plotting his future friendships as he doubled back to the top of the list and began working through the names that remained between those already scratched out.

Despite his overwhelming desire to jettison her before she could become a problem that bit him on the ass, Hermione had too much potential to ignore, especially if he could sand off some of her rough edges. Hmm. Maybe he could talk to Hermione on the train and convince her to pursue placement in Ravenclaw, and they could go there together? He would have an easier time of things there, where studying and extracurricular spell work were the norm rather than the exception, and she would enjoy the intellectual stimulation of housemates who preferred reading to partying. Perhaps that would be enough to keep her from bowing to peer pressure this time around or - if she couldn't manage that - she would at least bow to the pressure of peers with far less obnoxious habits. Writing the words 'must have' and underlining them, he then copied Hermione's name down underneath before moving to the Ravenclaw section of the list.

In addition to being an environment more conducive to learning, the house of eagles also held a number of potential friends and allies that just weren't present in Gryffindor. Terry Boot had been a great help in the war against Voldemort, as had Anthony Goldstein. Mandy Brocklehurst and Lisa Turpin had both been members of the DA of moderate but not particularly noteworthy power, but Padma Patil had been both decently powerful and extremely bright. A good companion for Hermione, Harry mused; they were roughly equivalent in both smarts and spell power and would be great sparring partners for each other both on the dueling strip and in the library. He didn't need both of them in his inner circle, but if they all ended up in Ravenclaw together, Padma would be a great way to keep Hermione occupied so he could spend time with other friends.

Su was also destined for Ravenclaw, which made the house an even more desirable destination, especially if he decided he did want to present her with a revised version of their old quid pro quo tutoring arrangement. While Gryffindors and Ravenclaws associating was hardly forbidden the way it was with Gryffindors and Slytherins, being in two separate houses would just make things needlessly complicated. And even if he didn't, Su had been a genuine joy to spend time with in his old world and this world's version of her seemed even warmer and friendlier, at least to those

she found worthy of her time. Suddenly, he paused. He'd promised he'd write her a letter and send it over with Silver Star, hadn't he? Harry jotted down a reminder for himself on his scrap parchment before writing Su's name beneath Hermione's in the 'must have' column and moving on.

Hufflepuff... the only boy in the house worth knowing brought his own complications, Harry realized. While he obviously didn't have anything against them, Justin Finch-Fletchley was a 'mudblood' and he already planned to have one of those in Hermione. Harry really didn't need another close friend he'd be stuck defending because people would discriminate against him based upon his parentage. Hmm. He could always cull Hermione, keep Su as his brain, and then bring in Justin to cover the 'muggle expert' role he needed filled so he could 'learn' from his friend and actually make use of the full range of knowledge floating around in his head... but that just seemed needlessly complicated. He knew both Hermione and Su better than he did Justin, and it would be easier to get Hermione to follow him and Su to Ravenclaw than it would be to get Su to follow him and Justin into Hufflepuff. Plus there was the risk that Harry attempting to enter the house would... wait, Justin would be sorted before him, so he'd know where the boy was going to be before his own sorting. Still. Even if it was him and Justin, assuming the other three boys were three of the four male Hufflepuffs from his native reality... it wasn't quite worth it. That didn't mean he couldn't try and be friends with Justin, though, just that he wasn't going to try and share a dorm with him or turn him into the new - and improved - Ron.

The next two names on his list came as a package deal as best Harry could tell. Then again, both Hannah Abbott and Susan Bones were witches worth befriending in his book. Hannah Abbott had been part of the DA and gone on to date Neville; they'd been engaged when they died in the final battle. He wouldn't mind having her at his back, especially given the vicious curses he'd seen her use on people who insulted Neville. Susan Bones had also been a bright young woman, soaking up his DA lessons like a sponge. What else would one expect from the niece of Amelia Bones, though? Like Su, both had grown into gorgeous young women. Which, while a lesser consideration compared to their personality, intelligence, and talents... was still something he took into consideration. If all other things were equal, why have a Pansy Parkinson when you could have a Daphne Greengrass?

Megan Jones, Sally-Anne Perks, and Brawnwen Teague were all cute, decent students, and members of the DA too. Branwen's thick accent had grated on him a bit but maybe if he spent more time with her, he'd get used to it. Any of one of them could provide him with a decent friend and an ally in Hufflepuff. Assuming, of course, that Hannah and Susan didn't pan out. Harry frowned, scratched his nose with the end of his quill, and then wrote 'Pick a Puff' beneath Su's name. Granted he might end up with two if he picked Susan or Hannah, but that wasn't necessarily a problem. The more the merrier, as long as they were genuine, loyal, and useful.

The few remaining names on the list all came from Slytherin and if his tea party idea fell through or they weren't on the invitation list, Harry had no idea how he'd approach any of them. Tracey Davis wasn't entirely unpleasant for a Slytherin but his main contact with her had come through Daphne Greengrass. And even if he ended up in Ravenclaw instead of Gryffindor, he wasn't quite sure how he'd go about approaching Daphne if he didn't meet her on the train or before September 1st. And Harry really didn't want to wait till his sixth year - or let Voldemort rise to such a level of power - in hopes that he could swoop in and save her from attempted rape, which had been the spark that ignited their friendship the first time around.

And Ráichéal O'Mochain... he had absolutely no clue what to do there. Like Megan, Sally-Anne, and Branwen, he'd be swinging in the dark if he attempted to strike up a friendship with her but on the other hand, the challenge might actually be fun. Also, assuming he couldn't deal with Voldemort completely before he managed to create a new body for himself, he would need eyes in the dungeons to keep tabs on the junior Death Eaters. Tracey, Daphne, Ráichéal, or Tara would be invaluable there.

Harry added a third note to his spare parchment: really push Lily about the tea party idea. Offer to do more cooking, even. He needed to see who Tara's friends were and hopefully befriend either the blonde, one or more of her friends, or both.

Hmm. So Hermione, Su, maybe a Hufflepuff, and preferably a Slytherin. Potentially twice the size of his original inner circle, but that was fine with him. The year after, Luna would arrive at Hogwarts and hopefully become the sixth member of their group. Maybe bringing her friend Lara as a seventh, just so she had a year mate to do homework with and such. And if Hermione and Su were

the only two he could secure from his own year, he could always try for another student from Luna and Lara's year or even someone from the year ahead of his just to meet someone new. And of course this didn't include just plain friends and acquaintances, which he hoped to have many of now that Hermione and Ron wouldn't be stifling his social life.

Muttering softly to himself, Harry scratched the end of his nose with his quill again and then went back to plotting.

"So let me get this straight... all this was your idea?"

"Yes."

"You made the tea and scones all by yourself?"

"Actually they're not scones, they're Cornish splits, but yes."

"But you're a boy."

"Your powers of observation astound me, Pansy." The rest of the girls tittered as Harry softened his joke with a smile; the last thing he needed was for Pansy to get genuinely upset at his joke and either leave or sit there sulking through the rest of tea. "But yes, I made this. My sisters are pants at cooking and I actually wanted to learn, so my mum switched some of our chores because it means less work for her and less wasted food." As the girls stared distrustfully at the food on the table, Harry rolled his eyes and leaned in. "Fine. I'll eat one first and when it doesn't kill me, you'll know they're safe."

Su let out a little snicker at that and reached in to smack at the back of his hand. When he recoiled, she took one of the splits and tore it open before setting the halves on her plate. "I trust you, Harry. I'm sure if you were trying to kill us, it'd be through poisoned tea that you'd already taken the antidote for or something." As she sat there spreading strawberry jam on her split, the rest of the girls stared down at their cups of tea uncertainly. "That was a joke."

Raising her cup to her mouth, Tara - or Altaira, he now knew, if she was feeling formal - took a long sip before setting her cup back down on the table. Then her eyes rolled back in her head and she flopped limply against the back of the sofa, making the other girls

scream and shoot to their feet. They were halfway down the hallway that connected the sitting room and the kitchen when Tara's soft giggle brought them to an abrupt stop. "It's just tea, girls. Merlin, you lot are jumpier than the aurors that come to my house."

Resisting the urge to laugh at the prank Tara had just played on her friends, Harry watched the girls return to the sitting room and take their seats again. Lily poked her head in and looked around curiously, only to retreat when Harry waved her off and mouthed 'later'. Picking up her cup again, Hannah Abbott took a sip of tea before addressing Tara's comment. "Well excuse us if we're a little freaked out. Boys are supposed to be out playing quidditch or planning gross pranks to pull on girls, not baking and hosting tea parties for them."

"That's just what the oppressive patriarchy wants you to think so that you don't question the gender roles you're being forced into and attempt to usurp their control of society." The girls turned to stare at Harry with wide eyes and he snickered. "Now I know what I looked like the first time Mum said that to Cassie. That means that you get told there are 'boy' things and 'girl' things because the old men are afraid of girls growing up and trying to kick them out of their cushy jobs of telling people what to do."

Hannah let out a soft 'oh' of comprehension. "Then why didn't you just say that?"

"Because saying it my mum's way makes me seem smarter?" Hannah giggled as Harry took the knife from Su and split his own pastry, smearing it with jam and clotted cream before offering the knife up to Pansy. The dark-haired future Slytherin eyed it for a moment before taking it and picking a split for herself. Turning his attention to Susan Bones, Harry took a bite from his split and then gestured at the redhead with it. "Look at your aunt, though, Sue. "Err, do you mind if I call you Sue?" She shook her head and Harry looked from her to Su and back before frowning. "...although I probably shouldn't when you and Miss Li here are in the same room because it'll get confusing fast. Anyways, Susan, your aunt has a job in a mostly male Ministry, in a department where there are only half a dozen other women and one of them is my cousin Dora, who's still in training. If your aunt and Dora can do that, why can't I like making pastries and talking to girls?"

Falling silent as they contemplated that, the rest of the girls served themselves and began to eat their splits. Sitting back, Harry let his eyes roam over the eight girls who'd come over for the afternoon. Su was his sole invitee apart from his coconspirator Tara and seemed happy to see him. He wasn't going to jinx it because there was still a chance he'd blow it between now and then, but between their meeting at Diagon Alley and the handful of letters they'd exchanged since then, it seemed like a nice friendship was forming between them. Tara herself had sent out a handful of invitations to a combination of what passed for her friends and the 'right' girls that she was obligated to invite due to their respective social statuses. Pansy fell into the former category it seemed, which didn't especially surprise Harry; she'd been linked to the House of Malfoy in his reality and so why would that change here? Their parents probably encouraged the friendship, even, because it would serve as an excuse to have Draco and Pansy in close proximity so they could start getting used to each other. Then there were Daphne Greengrass and Tracey - who had been introduced by nothing more than her given name, which made Harry curious - who seemed to fall into the latter category. There was probably a story behind it, but Harry doubted trying to bring it up would make for an enjoyable tea.

Somewhere in the middle of those two groups sat Susan, Hannah, and Branwen Teague. While they obviously weren't the best of friends, each of three got along with Tara well enough. Especially Branwen, who had brought out a facet of Tara that Harry hadn't been aware of: she was bilingual. Or rather the blonde was bilingual at a minimum; Harry had learned from the letters they exchanged that Su spoke three languages fluently and so there was always the possibility that Tara spoke three or more languages too. But when the girls broke their silence and began conversing in pairs, it quickly became Su and Pansy in one group, Hannah and Susan in another, Daphne and Tracey a third, and Tara and Branwen ended up engaged in a conversation that smoothly switched back and forth between English and Welsh. Which... actually ran contrary to his hopes for the day, he quickly realized. While he was glad Su was making a new friend - albeit one of questionable familial affiliation - he'd been hoping to get to know some of these girls. As of right now, he was the weird boy who liked making tea and pastries for them. Time to change that. "So... what subjects are you looking forward to most at Hogwarts? I think I'm probably going to do best at either Charms or DADA because of who my parents are."

"Probably Potions." Tara abruptly frowned and reached up to touch an emerald pendant she was wearing. "Although I'm hoping my godfather grades me fairly. I want to have the highest grades because I'm the best in the class, not because he's friends with my father."

Harry let out a snort at that. "I could be the best and I'd still get flunking grades in Snape's classes." Tara eyed him and Harry mentally winced; was the history between him and Harry's parents not widely known here or had it just been kept from Tara by way of her rather one-sided exposure to the participants in the feud? "My father and his friends didn't exactly get along with Snape, and when it comes to him and my mother... well, that's even more complicated."

Looking between the two, Su snapped her fingers. "Well that's easy to fix, isn't it? You should bribe her until she agrees to be your partner in class. Well, assuming you end up in houses that take Potions together. But that way, he can't mark you down without marking her down and if he's really that close to her family, I bet he wouldn't do that because it'd make her father angry."

After a second, Pansy let out a low whistle and brought a hand up to rest on Su's shoulder as she leaned in conspiratorially. "So, just out of curiosity... do you like green and silver?"

"Your son organized, cooked for, and is hosting a tea party for my daughter and her friends."

"I know."

"That's not normal preteen boy behavior, Lily."

"I know."

"And those comments about Severus, you, your husband, the Marauders..."

"I know, Narcissa! Damn it. I get it. You were right and I was wrong." Sighing, Lily ran a hand through her hair and looked back over her shoulder in the direction of the sitting room. Things had settled down since the scream earlier and now all she could hear was

conversation punctuated by loud laughter. "What are we going to do about it, though? James doesn't even know you're visiting, and doesn't pay enough attention to Harry that he'll seem different now."

Narcissa considered that as she lifted the spoon from her bowl of mint chocolate chip ice cream, her tongue flicking out to lap up a tendril of melted ice cream and thoroughly distracting Lily from her thoughts about Harry. When she began speaking, though, Lily forced her mind out of the gutter and back onto the topic at hand. "There's no saying we need to bring him into this, you know. The two of us can confront 'Harry' ourselves and deal with things. Stun him, bind him, and interrogate him. Depending on what he says, that's when we'll talk to your husband or our niece."

While it seemed equal parts crude and violent to Lily, it was hard to argue with due to the fact that she couldn't come up with anything better. Her mind went to work quickly, fleshing out the barebones outline Narcissa had offered: she could sneak something into James's food or cast a charm to keep him asleep through it all, and the twins and Dora could sleep through a giant attack. Lucius wouldn't be an issue; he was out of the country at the moment, which was why Narcissa had the freedom to drop by Potter Manor for most of an afternoon. Letting out a deep sigh, Lily nodded. As much as she didn't want to, it had to be done. "Alright. Come back tomorrow morning at half four. Harry goes for a run every morning at five; we can lay in wait for him in the kitchen and nab him on his way through." Narcissa nodded and Lily shoveled a spoonful of strawberry cheesecake ice cream into her mouth, then a second, before giving voice to the concern nagging at the back of her mind. "And if we're wrong and it really is Harry? Not that it looks very likely, mind you, but I'm just saying... what if? Because we should probably have a contingency plan ready just in case or he's going to tell James and things are going to get really awkward really fast."

"...I'm pretty handy with obliviate?"

Clad in sweatpants, a t-shirt, and his well-worn trainers, Harry slowly crept down the stairs, being careful to avoid the two that squeaked when stepped on. Reaching the ground floor, he turned and made his way towards the kitchen, intent on exiting the house through the back door for his morning run only to be brought up short by a soft moan. It wasn't until he heard it again that his brain processed the noise and where he'd heard it before, and he went Gryffindor red.

His parents were shagging. In the kitchen. Eww!

Turning away to head for the front door, Harry was brought up short a second later as he heard another female moan... from someone other than the source of the first two. "Mmm, Lily..." Jaw dropping, Harry turned back to the kitchen door and stared at it in disbelief. His mother and... or was his father and his mother and... what the bloody hell?

Harry took a step towards the kitchen before freezing. Did he really want to... after all, at least one if not both of his parents were... finally, morbid curiosity won out and he approached the door. Taking a deep breath, he pushed it open and then paused. His mother was standing in front of the kitchen island, leaning over a figure who had their long, pale legs wrapped around Lily's waist. Both were still dressed, but from the heated kisses they were exchanging and the way their hands were roaming, Harry wasn't sure if that was going to be the case for much longer. While he'd never seen anything quite as disturbing as his own mother in the middle of a romantic encounter, he'd seen some pretty damn disturbing things during his patrols as Head Boy and so he was able to keep his head and focus on the important things. Namely how to best embarrass his mother and her mistress. Smirking, he thought back to a particularly hated but always hilarious woman and her distinctive way of announcing her presence. "Hem hem."

"Harry!" Straightening up, Lily turned around and smoothed her shirt down, lips swollen and hair mussed from the activities he'd interrupted. "This isn't what it looks like."

Leaning to one side, Harry caught a glimpse of an all too familiar black-haired woman before his mother slid a step to the right, blocking his view. "So you're not cheating on Dad with a woman and shagging her on the kitchen counter at five in the morning?"

Lily looked a bit embarrassed at that, glancing back over her shoulder at her paramour. Narcissa propped herself up on her elbows before straightening up, arms wrapping around Lily's waist from behind as her chin came to rest on the redhead's shoulder. "Actually, to be fair, you interrupted us before we could actually get to the shagging part."

"That makes it so much better."

Joe's Note: I changed the acknowledgement phrase from "I will" to "I do" for the Unbreakable Vow because trying to rephrase the stipulations into versions that "I will" sounded like a correct response to was breaking my brain. The battle between Narcissa and Harry has been greatly expanded, with a hell of a surprise at the end. And... I dunno, just read the bloody thing. It made me literally double the size of the chapter and split Chapter Four into Chapters Four and Five, so I hope the work was worth it.

"Actually, to be fair, you interrupted us before we could actually get to the shagging part."

"That makes it so much better."

"Cissy!"

"What? It's true."

"He doesn't need to hear that sort of thing!"

As his mother and her... friend... argued, Harry tried to figure out when he'd left the Twilight Zone behind for the Twilighter Zone. He'd known his mother was having an affair from that exchange with Sirius earlier this summer but... wow. Narcissa Malfoy. She was right down there with Umbridge and Lockhart on the list of people Harry had suspected. Wow. Huh. Had his mother and Narcissa been a couple at Hogwarts at some point in his original universe? Or was their affair unique to this new world? And how long had this been going on for? After a moment, Harry decided that it really wasn't something he wanted to think about altogether too much. These versions of James and Lily Potter weren't even his real parents, just reasonable facsimiles thereof, and so their love lives - both together and separate - were none of his damn business. "Right. Well. I'm just going to go slip right on past you two and go out for my run. And do my best to pretend this never happened and I saw absolutely nothing and my mother is still being faithful to my father and babies are delivered by owls and so no sex is ever had by parents. So... yeah. And if you two crazy kids feel the need to have more fun, can you do it somewhere I'm not going to be preparing our food in an hour or two?"

Still working to smooth her hair back down into something presentable, Lily nodded absently as she stared at him, moving to the side so Narcissa could slide off the island and back onto her feet. "Well, enjoy your run, Harry." The dark-haired woman smiled at him, reaching behind herself and stretching in a way that made her chest strain against the front of her exceedingly low cut dress - and oh Merlin, he wasn't supposed to notice things like that about his mother's mistress - but the moment of distraction was evidently what she'd been looking for. "Oh, and... stupefy! Stupefy! Stupefy!"

Wand slipping into his hand, Harry instantly evaluated his surroundings before picking the best defense: compact, targeted shields he could easily control. After all, the last thing he needed was Narcissa spraying spells all over the house as he dove out of the way or cast wide area shields that would send incoming spells ricocheting off in random directions. And so nonverbally generating a small shield over the tip of his wand, he used it to deflect one stunner to the left and the second to the right, batting the third one down into the hardwood at his feet while simultaneously casting a wordless Reductor Curse downward. Using the resulting explosion of wood chips and sawdust as cover, Harry focused and apparated across the short distance to where he'd last seen Narcissa. Emerging right on target, he spun and tackled her from behind, disappearing away with her before they hit the floor.

Landing atop Narcissa on the grass of the quidditch pitch, Harry barely had time to savor the success of his plan before she brought her wand up and hit him in the side with a bludgeoner at point blank range. It felt like being kicked by a hippogriff but, even though it sent him flying halfway across the pitch before slamming into the ground, Harry thankfully didn't hear anything snap nor did he feel the telltale burning pain with each breath that would indicate cracked ribs. Hopping to his feet, he raised his wand and returned fire with a few stunners of his own, all of which Narcissa easily blocked. "So, your vocabulary's suddenly too large for your age, you're far too mature, you can cast silently and apparate... which one of my husband's associates are you, what do you want, and where is the real Harry Potter?"

"I am Harry Potter, you daft bint. Although right now I'm starting to wonder if you and your dear sister Trixie have swapped places because you've clearly gone insane." Free of the confines of the house, Narcissa stepped things up a notch, loosing two Bone-

Breakers before disappearing, reappearing behind and to his left and firing off something the color of mustard before popping away again. But likewise free of the shackles that came with fighting inside, Harry found himself instinctually slipping into a form of defense that had confounded most purebloods, dodging each spell and slowly circling Narcissa. "No, Trixie has no imagination. All Unforgivables and threats. You're definitely better than her."

Narcissa paused at the unexpected praise, shooting him an odd look before shaking her head and firing off a pale blue spell that made the skin of his arm tingle strangely as it raced past. "You didn't think Lucius married me just for my pretty face, did you?"

Chuckling, Harry let his gaze dip south for a moment before returning to her face. "Actually, yes. Well, that and the chest. Draco definitely had the fittest mum out of all my classmates at Hogwarts." Narcissa just stood there, staring at him in stunned disbelief, and Harry shrugged self-consciously. "What? I'm not ashamed to admit I'm a tit man. And yours are bloody huge." Scowling, the dark-haired woman hurled yet another spell at him and Harry parried it before returning fire with a few of the hexes they'd learned in sixth year DADA: low level fare that was mostly meant to irritate her and keep her on her toes. "Ah, so you're one of those women who has problems accepting compliments. Got it. I'll just stick to silent appreciation, then."

"Thank you. If you'd like to return to your real form, though, I might be a bit more receptive." The next two spells sent her way forced Narcissa to both conjure a shield and step back under the force of the impacts. "No offense, but having my lover's eleven-year-old son saying that sort of stuff to me is more than a little disgusting. The only thing worse would be if Altaira was doing it." Rolling his eyes, Harry decided to take a page from her own book and fired a Bone-Breaking Curse at her legs; surprisingly enough, Narcissa opted to dodge instead of shifting to the different shield required to block it. Interesting. Had she been working out with his mum, then? "So that would be a no to changing back?"

Harry shook his head. "Sorry, but I'm a little attached to this body. Seeing as how it's mine and all. Hope you don't mind. And I'll have you know that I may be eleven on the outside, but I'm very mature for my age." Letting out a chuckle, Narcissa fired a gaudy, bright pink spell that Harry easily dodged before abruptly stopping and

looking back at where it'd hit. "Okay, I have to know, what the bloody fuck was that?"

Raising her wand, Narcissa blew over the tip, a thin curl of bright pink luminescent smoke swirling upward as she shot him a very self-satisfied smile. "That, my dear, is what you can do when you get an O on your Ancient Runes NEWT. It's an Organ Liquefying Curse. It does what the name suggests. I never made a counter for it and considering it kills in seconds, I doubt that even having one would be worth much."

"Huh. That's impressive. If you live through this, remind me to ask you to teach it to me. It sounds useful. Although as long as we're sharing, do you want to see what you can do when you've never taken Ancient Runes but have a few tutors who have?" Jabbing his wand out at Narcissa, Harry finished with a sharp twist and a grin. "Reiff! trydan!"

Trying to dodge the spell was an exercise in futility, but Narcissa gave it her best shot. And so instead of being hit head on, the blue tendrils of electricity that emerged from the end of Harry's wand lashed into the woman's side, making her scream and collapse to the grass. Harry watched with savage glee as the electricity continued to crawl over her body, making her body jerk wildly as she flopped around on the pitch like a fish out of water. After holding her under for a few more seconds, Harry broke the spell and moved in to stand over the prone woman, grinning down at her. "You see, Cissy, the trick isn't having the deadliest spells. It's hitting with the spells you do cast."

It took her a few slow, deep, wheezing breaths to recover and then Narcissa spat up at him. "Fuck... you..."

Harry wiped at his cheek to remove the spittle before wagging a finger at her. "I thought you said I was too young for that, Cissy?" She let out a low growl and tried to climb to her feet, only to end up on her back again when Harry's trainer came down hard on her chest. "Another thing you should know? I don't mind stunners. I don't mind bone breakers. I'll even tolerate some of the more amusing dark arts spells. But when we start getting into instant death? I start getting angry. And you know what Voldemort and his Death Eaters found out really fast? You won't like me when I'm angry."

As he stood over his opponent, Harry tried to figure out what to do next. He'd been willing to settle for some humiliation and a clear magical victory over the older woman, and then she'd tried to liquefy his organs. Rage burned through his veins, demanding satisfaction, and a cruel smirk twisted Harry's lips as he thought of the perfect way to end things: a spell created by the godfather of Narcissa's child, both here and in his original dimension. Either he'd end things permanently or if the threat of impending death finally knocked some sense into the woman, he could counter it and still leave her with a permanent reminder of why such behavior was unacceptable. "Nice try, but not good enough. Now it's time to pay the piper, Cissy. Sectumse-"

"Expelliarmus!"

Hit at point blank range, Harry found himself cursing his lapse in situational awareness as his wand was torn from his hand. It flew off to his right, flipping end over end before landing in his mother's outstretched hand. Et tu, Brute? He'd thought that Narcissa had snapped for some bizarre reason and that he was protecting his mother from her... but evidently not. The two of them were conspiring against him. But why? To what end? Circling slowly, Harry moved to place Narcissa between himself and the furious looking Lily as she thrust her wand out at him, the tip glowing cyan. "Give me one reason why I shouldn't kill you now."

Harry raised his hands in surrender and limped back a few steps so Lily could approach Narcissa while still keeping some distance between them. "Well, there's the fact that the Ministry tends to frown on filicide and I doubt visiting Azkaban is on your bucket list?" Making a pulling motion, Harry cast a wandless Disarming Charm on his mother, aiming specifically for her right hand so if he didn't get both wands, at least he'd get his back. Which was especially important if his wand was enough like the Elder Wand to pick a 'master'; the last thing he needed was to be walking around with a wand that didn't 'belong' to him. Lily managed to keep a firm grip on her own wand but lost control of his, the slim holly rod flying through the air towards him. He snagged it neatly out of the air and debated pocketing it before deciding to keep it out and ready. He didn't want to leave himself defenseless if Narcissa and Lily decided they wanted round two, although he was really hoping to solve this with words. The fire and rage he'd felt when fighting Narcissa had been intoxicating... familiar, even. After not having a real challenge for

three whole months, the rush of fighting had overwhelmed him and if not for Lily's interference, he'd been ready to disfigure or kill Narcissa. And as much as it scared him to admit it, he wasn't sure he'd be able to pull himself back from that edge if he got too into a fight with his mother. A fight he was none too eager to even get into in the first place. "You know, Mum, considering she attacked me? I'm pretty sure you're defending the wrong person here. You know, one of us being your son and the other not?"

"Right. My son knows wordless and wandless magic and can apparate. I'm pretty sure I'm defending exactly the person I should be here." Moving to stand in front of Narcissa, Lily turned sideways to present a slimmer target and trained her glowing wand tip on his chest. Going for center mass, a tactic he didn't often see among magicals outside of those he trained himself. Smart woman. "Now who are you, what do you want, and where's my real son? And if you've harmed a single hair on his head, the spells Narcissa was flinging your way are going to seem like Tickling Charms compared to what I use on you."

Harry merely raised an eyebrow at that threat. "Just so you know, you're going to feel really bad when the truth comes out about this whole mess and you realize that you've been plotting with Cissy there to kill your own son." Idly, Harry wondered what precisely he'd done to give himself away. Was it any one action? Or had he tried to change too many things too quickly? Obviously his apparition and duel with Narcissa had proven their suspicions right, at least in their own minds, but what had inspired them to come up with this plan in the first place? As Lily continued to stare at him intently, wand raised and ready, Harry let out a deep sigh. "Right then. Can we go back to the house and discuss this like adults or should I knock you around and then drag you both back there? Because while I can do it, I'd really rather not duel my own mother. There aren't many lines I won't cross, but hurting family members is one of them." Lily opened her mouth and Harry waved his hand. "Just because you're sleeping with her doesn't make her family. Get a divorce or annulment and then remarry and then maybe I'll feel bad about knocking around someone when they're trying to kill me."

Climbing unsteadily to her feet, Narcissa staggered forward to stand beside Lily and put one hand on her lover's arm, slowly sliding it up until she could take the redhead's wand away. Murmuring softly, she tapped it against her own wand several times, causing ghostly

shapes to emerge from the end. Prior incantato. But why? The sequence ended with three identical spells one after another. "In my defense, I did try to stun you first."

Ah. Yes. Except for the fact that... "And then you tried to kill me."

"Well yes. Stunning you clearly wasn't working. Although... I suppose if you have a very good reason for abducting Harry Potter and taking his place, I suppose me trying to kill a kidnapper and potential assassin might seem unreasonable. Mister... who exactly are you? And how are you staying in Harry Potter's form?" Reaching up, Narcissa tapped her wand against the side of the slim silver wireframe glasses she was wearing. Huh. Those were new. At least as far as he was concerned. Not that he'd ever gotten a real good look at her before this, but he definitely hadn't seen the Narcissa of his world wearing them out in public. "It's not polyjuice or a glamour as best I can tell; I can see magic thanks to these and I would know if you were using either."

Harry's eyes narrowed as he contemplated the possibilities that such glasses would afford him. How come nobody had ever told him there were glasses that could see magic, see through glamours, and even see through or at least detect polyjuice? Had it never occurred to anyone that they might come in handy during his fight against Voldemort? Or were they an application of magic unique to this universe? If it came down to that, before he killed her, he definitely had to get into her mind and figure out where he could go and get a pair of his own. For now, though, he would continue with his plan of trying to defuse the two angry women who thought he was a Death Eater or Death Eater sympathizer who had kidnapped Harry Potter. "If I take a magical oath will you two finally stop threatening me and listen to what I have to say?" Lily and Narcissa exchanged looks before turning back to him and nodding. "Right then. I, Harry James Potter, do hereby swear on my life and magic that I am in fact the son of James Potter and Lily Potter née Evans and that I do not serve, nor have I at any time served, Voldemort. So mote it be." There was a bright flash of light and Harry waited a few seconds before reaching up to scratch the back of his neck. "Well, I'm not dead yet. I think I'll go for a walk."

Gesturing with her empty hand, Lily paused and stared at it in confusion for a moment before retrieving her wand from Narcissa's possession, trying again and successfully pointing it in Harry's

direction this time. "Not so fast. I want to see you cast a spell, too. Magic is a strange and fickle thing, you know; you could be telling a half-truth and so it only decided to punish you halfway."

"We did cover the part where I don't want to duel my own mother, right?"

"In which case you might want to point your wand somewhere other than at me when you cast the spell?"

"Touché." Turning, Harry began to pace back and forth in front of them, wand tapping gently against his hip as he thought. "I could do something simple like a lumossPELL but that's just... boring. On the other hand, after what happened at Ollivander's? I'm thinking that I probably shouldn't try creating flames or water unless I want to burn the pitch down or flood it. Hmm... oh! I know!" Given its thought and emotion based components, along with the necessity of high levels of willpower and magical strength, it was one of the few spells Harry couldn't cast silently... but casting it period should be good enough, he reasoned. "Expecto patronum!"

He had the power, he had the memories, he had the will... the question wasn't whether the corporeal patronus would form for him, but rather what it would form. Harry had seen Tonks's change when she'd married Remus and knew it was affected by life events. The way the arrogant jackass that was the James of this world had destroyed his mental image of his father probably counted as such. A few hours ago, he might have guessed that a doe would emerge after hearing from his old universe's Remus that it was the form his mother's patronus took... but he now found that equally as doubtful seeing as how she had planned and participated in this little attack on him. So if it wasn't going to be a stag... and it wasn't going to be a doe... what would it be?

When the patronus burst from the end of his wand, Harry actually had to shift to a two-handed grip as the slim holly rod bucked hard in his hand. Unlike when he'd cast the spell before, where a burst of silvery-white light emerged before resolving into his father's animagus form, the swirling energy just kept coming... and coming... and then finally - fifteen seconds into the casting of the spell - began resolving into a corporeal patronus. And it was neither a stag nor a doe, nor was it an owl or maybe a crumple-horned

snorkack to match his deceased fiancé's. Oh no. He'd managed to create... "You have got to be bloody fucking kidding me. A basilisk?"

The trio stared at the basilisk in silence, the great beast slithering back and forth a few times curiously before dissipating. Harry tucked his wand away and the awkward silence continued until Lily finally broke it with a low whistle. "Well, I suppose that proves your magic is still intact. And you're still alive. Oh sweet Merlin, I just helped someone attempt to kill my own son. But... but how?" Pulling away from Narcissa, it was Lily's turn to pace back and forth in front of Harry, absently twirling her wand with her fingers as she thought aloud. "You're only eleven. Even if you read it all and were some sort of genius, you shouldn't have the magical reserves to cast something like that, much less after a duel with Narcissa."

"Not to mention the comments he made about me during the duel."

"Yes, I'd prefer not to mention those, thank you very much. A possession, maybe?" Lily stopped and stared at Harry for a moment before shaking her head and resuming her pacing. "No, I don't think magic would let him survive the oath. Even if he was Harry on the outside, the person swearing the oath wouldn't be Harry James Potter and so they'd be punished. I think."

Sighing, Harry stepped in front of Lily and grabbed her wrist, twisting and letting his free hand snap out to take Narcissa by the hand. Before either woman could free herself, Harry gathered the energy required and pulled a tricky triple apparition to bring them back to the house's breakfast nook, a louder than normal pop echoing in the room as his mother and Narcissa stumbled away from him. "The thing is, Mum, that you're stuck thinking inside this box that's keeping you from coming anywhere close to the truth. You see, you're under the impression that you gave birth to 'the' Harry Potter. That there is only 'the' Harry Potter. The truth is? There are many 'a' Harry Potters. You gave birth to 'a' Harry Potter."

Lily's eyes went wide as the truth finally hit her. "And you're another of them. An older one, I'm guessing. Either that, or your world is one twisted and disturbed place." Flicking her wand, the redhead summoned one of the chairs from the breakfast nook and helped Narcissa lower herself into it. "So... what happens now? Where are we supposed to go from here?"

"Well, let's see. I need to make sure that you don't throw me out and keep my secrets. You both need to make sure I don't 'accidentally' let your affair slip to your respective husbands." Hopping up to sit on the kitchen island, Harry held up his wand. "Unbreakable Vows all around then? Mum, you can be the bonder for Mother and I and then Mother, you can bond Mum and I." The two women exchanged bewildered looks before looking back at Harry, who couldn't quite understand the source of their confusion. "What? If you can think of a better idea than Unbreakable Vows, I'd like to hear it. Or is it the whole Mother and Mum thing? Because I can't just call both of you Mum; that would get really confusing really fast. And by the way the two of you were going at it, I'm guessing this is a serious and long-running affair and not something you threw together to try and catch me off my guard. At least I'm sorta hoping it is. After all, there's no way Cissy can possibly be a worse parent to me than James has been. Plus, if it isn't? I lose my primary blackmail material and have to resort to threatening to tell Dad that you two attacked me, and sharing the memories of that would be just as bad as letting you two blab."

Even as Lily just stared at him in stunned disbelief, Narcissa threw her head back and laughed. "Oh, I'm so glad you and Tara are getting along better these days. It'll make things so much easier when the two of you get sorted into Slytherin together." Him? Slytherin? Not bloody li... although there was the matter of his new patronus. Crap. Maybe he would be wearing green and silver come September. Well, at least Su wasn't prejudiced against the house yet and could probably be talked into following him there. Hermione, on the other hand... "I can't argue with your logic, though. I'm up for it if Lily is."

The two turned to look at the mistress of the house, who blushed and looked down at her hands. "I've heard of them but I've never had a reason to sit down and read up on exact what one is."

Harry, unable to stop himself, tossed out a gem Ron had offered in his old universe. "Well, you can't break an Unbreakable Vow..."

Head snapping up, Lily glared at the laughing Harry. "I'd worked that much out for myself, funnily enough." At that point, Narcissa joined him in laughter and she let out an indignant huff. "That's it. Funny man, you get to make breakfast by yourself." That didn't really bother him all too much; after all, he'd done it for years at the

Dursleys' house. But Lily wasn't done. Brandishing her wand, she turned her attention back to Narcissa. "And you, my dear, are going to sit here, let me check you over, and if I don't know everything I need to about these Unbreakable Vows by the time I'm done with that? Someone's going to be sleeping in a cold, lonely bed tonight and it won't be me."

"Like any sleeping happens when I'm over here."

"I do not need to hear this!"

His duties having evolved from mere market pickups to genuine grocery shopping around when his 'cooking lessons' began, Harry had taken advantage of his freedom to begin shifting the contents of the fridge and pantry under his mother's nose. Accordingly, the breakfast that hit the table that morning was similar to the traditional full English breakfast he'd served his family that first morning while showing hints of the local cuisine that his mother seemed content to ignore in her own cooking. While the fried mushrooms, hash browns, and baked beans remained a constant, the black pudding and fried tomatoes were absent and the eggs were fried instead of scrambled. The rashers of streaky bacon were likewise nowhere to be found, having been replaced in the fridge with back bacon from a Falmouth butcher almost as soon as Harry received permission to do the shopping. And the sausages... those were a particular favorite. Made from pork and Cornish blue cheese, they were usually in short supply at the market he visited and if his sisters wanted to turn up their noses at them again? It just meant more for him, Dora, and... well, Stasis Charms that would keep them until the two of them could make a second pass later in the day.

Jasmine and Rose did indeed turn their noses up at his choice of sausage for the day, which made Dora and him share a grin before the auror trainee left for work and the twins wandered off to do... something. James had never even come in for breakfast, which left Harry alone in the breakfast nook with Lily, Narcissa, and Tara. Harry ate with deliberate slowness, planning his words, and so he was caught off guard when Tara decided to open things. "So... I managed to make it through the entire night without you two waking me up. Is something wrong? Are you two breaking up?"

Choking on the mouthful of baked beans he'd just shoveled into his mouth, Harry felt something pound his back a few times and then he spit his breakfast all over the tablecloth. Given the locations of the rest of the room's occupants... the same spell his mother regularly used on Dora, he assumed. Quickly vanishing the mess with his wand, Harry took a long sip of water and then stared at Tara incredulously. "You knew?"

He got a reply in the form of a raised eyebrow and a superior smirk. "You didn't?"

"No. Well, at least not until I walked in on them this morning. On the kitchen counter." Harry chuckled as Tara's gaze dropped to the empty plate of food in front of her and a distinctly greenish tinge spread across her features. "Don't worry, I had Dobby come and clean the whole kitchen before I even opened the fridge." It had been decidedly interesting to have Narcissa summon the rather eccentric elf and discover that he was just as strange in this world, where he was assigned to Narcissa and Tara and therefore insulated from the abuse he'd suffered in the other world. Harry had always assumed that Lucius or Draco had done something to the elf to turn him into the rather bizarre little creature he'd met in second year. Obviously not. "Anyways, what do you know about Unbreakable Vows, Tara?"

Tara didn't even miss a beat before replying, making him wonder if she'd been eavesdropping earlier. "Well, you can't break an Unbreakable Vow..."

Letting out a sigh, Lily tilted her head back and stared at the ceiling as she shook her head in disgust. "I should have James contact Lucius and begin negotiating a marriage contract; the two of you deserve each other." Tara let out a giggle at that and the redhead smiled before becoming more serious. "Jokes aside, Tara, do you know what they are?" The young blonde nodded. "We need you to swear one to Harry. Then he can tell you - and the rest of us; he's making us wait so he only has to do it once - some very important things and if he wants to tell anyone at school, you can be his bonder." The delay was slightly longer this time, but Tara eventually nodded. "Okay. Harry, come here."

Harry slowly and deliberately finished off the last piece of sausage on his plate before wiping his hands and rising to his feet. Moving to

stand in front of Tara, he held out his arm and waited for her to do likewise, moving to grab her wrist as she assumed a mirror position. Narcissa rose and circled around to stand beside them, bringing the tip of her wand to rest atop their linked hands. "Do you swear that you will protect any secret shared with you by Harry James Potter regarding his origin or abilities unless explicitly told otherwise?"

"I do."

"Do you swear that you will protect any information regarding Harry James Potter's origin or abilities that you discover for yourself unless explicitly told otherwise?"

"I do."

"Do you swear to eschew trousers, short trousers, and other garments based on trousers and wear only skirts or dresses from this day forth unless asked to do otherwise by Harry James Potter, Lily Potter née Evans, or Narcissa Malfoy née Black?"

"...I do." For the third time, a thick tongue of fire wound around their clasped arms before dissipating. As the two broke apart, Tara shook her head slowly. "Really, Harry? You bound me to wearing what I'd wear anyways?"

With a shrug, Harry wandered back down to take his seat, casting a weak Warming Charm over the remains of his breakfast. A childhood with the Dursleys had firmly ingrained a habit of 'waste not, want not' that he'd never managed to shake. "I was halfway through the second vow when I realized the third one from when I had your mother and mine take theirs didn't mean anything for you. So I just made something up on the fly. And I'm doing you a favor. It'll protect you from Mum's speeches about rebelling against the oppressive patriarchy. Or at least the clothing related ones." As Lily sputtered indignantly, Harry evaluated what remained on his plate before adding a Stasis Charm, deciding to save it for later in favor of leaving room to 'waste not' the sausages remaining on the platter. After story time was finished, he decided. They'd been very patient with him, after all. Folding his hands in his lap, Harry adopted a more serious expression. "So... my story starts on October 31st 1991, in a small town named Godric's Hollow... when Peter Pettigrew betrayed my parents and led Voldemort to where they lived..."

The remainder of August was similar to the first two and a half months Harry had spent in his new universe, albeit with a few subtle differences. His father's periods of absence seemed to grow even longer and more frequent, the man sometimes disappearing for two or three days at a time, and Narcissa had taken advantage of his absences to spend more time at Potter Manor. Tara likewise had taken to having more 'sleepovers with the twins'; in actuality, Tara and the twins barely interacted and the blonde either spent her time studying and practicing first year spells or talking with Harry and picking his far more learned brain before retiring to the spare bedroom up on the second floor.

A bright spot most days came around lunchtime with the arrival of an owl: Silver Star, Su's spotted owlet Maau Tau Jing and the Owl-That-Would-Have-Been-Hedwig-If-He'd-Bought-Her-But-Was-Now-Albiona had been put on rotating postal duty ferrying letters between Perranarworthal and Harwich. They were always short missives with little information of significance to them, but his goal was to solidify his blossoming friendship with Su and they did their job there. He now knew about some of the basic cuisine and culture of Shanghai and she knew something about what life was like when you had siblings and lived in a house in what was close to the middle of nowhere. Nothing earth shattering, but that could wait until they were face-to-face at Hogwarts again.

While there had inevitably been some stiffness following that fateful night and the next morning's revelations, Lily had slowly but surely warmed back up to him after he'd succeeded in convincing her that he hadn't come to inhabit her son intentionally, nor was he a threat to her family... or Narcissa, as long as she kept her wand to herself. It had helped that he'd been able to get her to see an important truth: if not for Harry's displacement of her original son, the person she'd come to enjoy spending time with wouldn't be present in her life. Narcissa, shockingly enough, had come to serve almost as a therapist for him, letting Harry ramble on for hours about his world, his lost love, his frustrations with how certain events or facets of his life had unfolded, and anything else he needed to talk about. And ever so slowly, 'Mother' evolved from being a joke to a genuinely affectionate appellation.

So life, while not perfect, was pretty darn good.

The last days of summer, or rather his summer, slipped away far faster than Harry expected and suddenly it was August 31st and he was helping cook one last breakfast at home. After everyone was fed, watered, washed, and dressed, the four Potters - James was busy with work, of course - Narcissa, and Tara piled into the van Lily owned for when they had to venture into the muggle world and drove down to the Perranwell train station, whose sole operating track also ran along the northern boundary of the Potter family property. Which, in turn, led Lily to launch into a lecture about modern British rail service worthy of one of Hermione's long-winded rambles. Thankfully, the wait was short and they were soon bundled onto an eastbound train - a British Rail Class 150 DMU, he now knew against his will - along the Maritime Line to Truro. It actually was a bit interesting, Harry had to admit. He'd seen the Maritime Line south over the Perran, Ponsanooth, and Collegewood Viaducts to Falmouth when the family had opted to go to a Falcons game the muggle way in mid-August, but venturing northeast to Truro would be new.

Arriving at Truro Station, the family disembarked and crossed from Platform One to Platform Two - an ever so long jaunt of two yards - to board a new train bound for London along the aptly named London to Penzance Line. This, he learned from a new lecture, involved a trip aboard what British Rail called an InterCity 125: a series of normal passenger cars between a pair of Class 43 diesel locomotives, whose top speed of a hundred and twenty-five miles per hour made them the fastest diesel locomotives in the world. That little tidbit had made Harry blink. While he was no magical supremacist and knew the value of muggles and their inventions, having grown up as one, the idea that this massive metal hulk could reach over eighty percent of the top speed of his Firebolt was amazing. Given the Ministry used converted modern automobiles and such, Harry mused, maybe someday it would be possible for someone to convince them to abandon the steam-based Hogwarts Express and switch to one of these trains. The trips to and from Hogwarts would literally be cut in half... leaving students more time with their families on outbound days and returning them sooner on inbound days. It would be good for families. Harry made a mental note to pass the thought on to Sirius for him to suggest at a future Wizengamot session.

And Merlin, the idea of Sirius Black as a member of wizarding Britain's legislative body was just... scary.

On the five hour ride to London, Harry alternated between reading the books he'd deemed safe for public viewing and watching the scenery go by. Thanks to his upbringing - and he used the term loosely - with the Dursleys, his knowledge of geography was limited to primary school textbooks and wall maps. Until the Flight from the Letters and his subsequent trip with Hagrid to London, he'd never left Little Whinging. And so while a number of the cities he saw when glancing up from his book looked rather similar, they were still all new to him and Harry found himself wishing he could stop time each time the train pulled into a station just so he could poke his head out and look around. Maybe he could sign up for too many electives in third year, he mused, get a Time Turner and then abuse it a bit...

When the train merged onto the four track wide main line heading in to London, Harry tucked his book away and watched out the window as they traveled through increasingly urbanized areas. Almost every station seemed to have extra lines that were the source of branches to other parts of England and Wales, and most had a train either arrive or leave as they sat waiting to let passengers on and off. Finally, the train pulled into London Paddington and the Potter-Black brigade trooped off onto the platform, thankful for a chance to finally stretch their legs for a bit.

It didn't last long, though; Lily quickly bundled them onto a Piccadilly-bound train on the Bakerloo Line of the Underground and they were off again. Thankfully that took only eleven minutes and they were back above ground... in a very familiar area. Harry almost took the lead, only to hold himself back at the last minute. After all, he wasn't supposed to know where the muggle side of the Leaky Cauldron was, now was he? The group arrived and spread out over three rooms rented from Tom for the night - the twins and Tara in one, Harry in another, and the adults in the last - and then filled the remainder of the day with sightseeing and dinner before retiring to their rooms.

The next morning, Harry showered, dressed, and joined his family for breakfast downstairs before passing through the floo to Platform Nine and Three-Quarters in London. Since it was just him and Tara going off to school they ignored the muggle luggage carts and Harry took his trunk's handle in one hand and Albiona's cage in the other,

moving towards the all too familiar train waiting to take him to Hogwarts. After final goodbyes and a few too many pictures, Harry said his final goodbyes to his family before boarding the train, looking up and down the corridor before setting off towards the back in search of an empty compartment. After picking one at random, he hoisted Albiona's cage into the overhead rack and then dug through his trunk, selecting two books to occupy him during the ride before using magic to float his trunk up next to his owl. Opening one book as a bit of cover, Harry settled in to do a bit of people watching.

Joe's Note: If there are any glaring errors or inconsistencies, let me know. Some might be because it's an alternate universe and things are genuinely different here, but given this is a rewrite - several times over - of my original rewrite which was a transcription of a story that mauled the English language and good taste several times over... I'm not perfect. Letting me know when things slipped past me, however, brings the story closer to being perfect. Also, most people are willing to accept there's a roughly ten percent lesbian/gay/bisexual/transgender population. That means out of forty students in Harry's year, four would be LGBT. One will be in Harry's group of friends. Most people found her amusing in the last version of this. You might not. If alternative sexual lifestyles really bother you that badly, just hit back. Granted I'm pretty sure Lily and Cissy scared those people off, but I figured I'd give one last warning. Oh, and bonus points to anyone who can figure out what the chapter title is a play on and why it's extra funny in this particular circumstance.

His brief encounters with Neville, the Patils, and Su had given him a taste of what the Hogwarts Express eventually delivered in spades as it grew closer to eleven o'clock: familiar faces back in too-youthful bodies. His parents had died when he was one, his sisters had never existed, Anastasiya and Cassie had likewise been missing from his original universe, and the only time he'd met a young and healthy Sirius or Remus was back when he was still filling a diaper. Seeing them like this was just as new to him. But seeing his former classmates back in the bodies they'd had in his first year was... highly disturbing, he decided.

Fred and George were the first to pass by his compartment, bookending a slightly younger girl with glasses and black hair. Harry grinned, wondering what the trio could possibly be discussing in low voices, their heads close together. Likely nothing good. A slightly chubby girl with the same red hair as the twins trailed along behind them, and Harry blinked before shrugging. He had spare siblings. Why not the Weasley clan? The sighting of two confirmed Weasleys and a potential third had Harry thinking back to another September 1st and brought a few questions he'd always had back to the front of his mind. Why hadn't the Weasleys flooded in like his family had chosen to? And why had Missus Weasley - on her eighth year of sending students to Hogwarts - wandered around King's Cross talking loudly about muggles and quizzing her children about the hidden platform?

Hmmph. He was starting to turn into Mad-Eye, seeing conspiracies everywhere.

Then again, you weren't paranoid if they really were out to get you.

Another thing Harry noticed was how many people were talking about Neville Longbottom, nattering on endlessly about their precious Boy-Who-Lived. Had it been that bad when he was on the train? He didn't remember the whispers quite as prevalent but then again, he'd shut himself up inside a compartment early in the journey and not emerged until they arrived at Hogwarts. It certainly was annoying. The kid had bounced a Killing Curse off his fat, snobby head. It wasn't like he'd led a great army in battle against a dark wizard or anything.

A girl with long, reddish-brown hair walked past and Harry almost wrote her off until he noticed her attire: the basic, trim-free black robes of an incoming first year. That was interesting development he'd never taken into consideration. This universe evidently had students in it that he wouldn't be familiar with. Harry thought of the list sitting in his journal. He'd been prepared to take into account a bit of drift between the two universes, like Neville and Parvati, but for some reason he'd never even considered that there might be students missing or new students joining his class.

And who knew what other changes could have been wrought over the last ten years by parents making slightly different choices when it came to raising their children? An odd mental image came to him and he chuckled. Maybe Hermione's parents had encouraged her to play sports instead of obsessing over school, and she and Dean Thomas would spend most nights in the common room arguing over football. Maybe Ron, the backstabbing bastard that he was, would end up in Slytherin. Wouldn't that be perfect? First Weasley in generations not in the house of lions.

Half a mo. Who had that girl with the Weasley twins been? It certainly wasn't Katie, Angelina, Alicia, or... bugger, who was that friend Katie had brought to DA? Leanne. Wasn't her either, or at least he didn't think it was. So who was she? And why was she their partner in crime instead of Lee Jordan?

Shaking his head, Harry slouched down in his seat and put his legs up on the opposite bench, focusing his attention on the book in front of him. What ifs were great but ultimately useless. Until he arrived at school and spent a bit of time with his peers, guessing would accomplish nothing more than wasting his time. Time he could think of better uses for, such as establishing his bookworm façade so people wouldn't question his growing repertoire of spells. And so he put his curiosities out of mind, found the spot where he'd left off, and went back to reading.

An hour or so into the journey, Harry's reading was disturbed as someone wrenched his compartment door open and stomped inside, slamming it shut and throwing themselves down across from him with a huff. After a moment, in which the other person made no move to initiate conversation, Harry marked his spot in his book and closed it, laying it on his lap. Who he found sitting across from him surprised him greatly.

It was Hermione, and yet she wasn't the Hermione he had known back in his first year and had expected to meet again. This Hermione was... well, brawny. Not on the level of Millicent 'half troll and it shows' Bulstrode, but in only a muggle t-shirt and jeans, it was very easy to spot that her level of physical fitness rivaled or perhaps even exceeded his own, and he was no slouch when it came to taking care of his body. Her hair was merely wavy instead of the frizzy mess he was used to, pulled back into a simple ponytail to keep it out of the way. And she was giving him a fierce glare, a look she hadn't perfected until after some of her adventures with him and Ron. "Take a photograph, it bloody well lasts longer. Oh wait, you probably don't know what a photo is. Snobby magical wankers."

Harry's jaw dropped. Hermione swearing? Leaning over, he looked out the window and peered up at the sky. Well, there was no rain of hellfire and brimstone yet. Huh. The other universe's Ron owed him a galleon. Turning back to Hermione, he offered her a smile. "Actually, we do have photographs. Wizard ones even move, like movies that last a few seconds before restarting. But... based on that hello, I'm going to guess that you get along with the purebloods about as well as I do."

"All I did was overhear some of them talking about quidditch and ask if I could come in. I think the game sounds fascinating and it's not like anything I've ever seen in the, err, muggle world. They figured

out I was a muggleborn pretty quick and things went downhill." Hermione scowled and looked down, flexing the fingers on her right hand. They seemed a bit scraped and red, which made Harry curious. She realized what he was staring at and raised her hand proudly. "Some dumb sod named Longbottom called me a 'mudblood' to my face. Not sure what it means, but his expression made the intent pretty clear. So I hope you lot know a way to get his teeth back into his mouth. And really, Longbottom? Most English surnames come from your ancestors' occupation. My family used to be farmers; that's where the last name Granger comes from. What the hell kind of bizarre family does he come from?"

He couldn't help it anymore; Harry leaned his head back and laughed loudly. "A magical one. And a really vain one at that. Can't believe you punched the Boy-Who-Lived, though, that's priceless. Wish I'd been there to see that." Hermione gave him a curious look. "Oh, you don't know? Neville's a celebrity here in the magical world. His parents and mine used to be friends until he got famous for basically doing nothing, and his parents developed huge egos to match their son's."

Hermione's jaw dropped and Harry noticed she lacked the oversized front teeth of her other world counterpart. "I punched a celebrity? Huh. Well, he deserved it and I'll punch anyone who says otherwise." Wow, this Hermione was a violent one. Did that mean there was a Ron somewhere on the train with his nose buried in a book? "So, you're not a pureblood I take it?"

"Nope. Harry Potter, half-blood extraordinaire at your service. My father is a pureblood and my mother is a muggleborn like you. So yes, I know what electricity, movies, and cars are. And you would be... someone Granger. Do you have a first name, Miss Granger, or shall we just do the Madonna thing and call you 'Granger'?"

Hermione rolled her eyes and offered Harry a two-fingered salute. "Hermione. Hermione Granger. So do you know anything about sports? Quidditch or muggle ones? The other kids don't seem to realize that people play games other than quidditch, especially in the muggle world."

Shaking his head, Harry decided to go with the truth since he did have patchwork knowledge of the muggle world but not enough to convincingly fake an interest in something Hermione liked. The girl

could be bloody scary sometimes, and if her focus was on athletics instead of academics in this world, she could probably name every player in the Premier League or some such. "No, I grew up in a town called Perranarworthal in Cornwall. I didn't go to muggle school so I couldn't do any of the local sports. I've watched a few pick-up football games, but the only sport I've really been exposed to is quidditch. You?"

After a moment, Hermione reached down and rolled up one leg of her jeans to show off a large, puckered scar on her shin. "I play field hockey. Goalkeeper. Sometimes, I go without pads because then I can toss my helmet at the coach and move up past half field with my teammates to try and score. Earned myself a compound fracture a few months ago, which actually worked out well because I was supposed to do a presentation at the Hampshire County Science Fair on the same day as one of my games, and the injury cleared up my schedule. When Professor McGonagall came to speak with my parents, I was still in a cast with stitches and the works. She brought Madam Pomfrey over and they fixed me up in minutes. Well, the bone at least; I decided to keep the scar for when I'm older because my father says women dig scars. I have to say, the bigotry is a pisser but it's hard to hate a world that can put you back on the playing field in a day instead of months."

Merlin's left nut, Hermione played field hockey? Harry had seen the Stonewall High boys team practicing during the summer between his fourth and fifth years. It was a rough sport. And... why would she care if women dug scars? Unless... huh. Was this Hermione like his mother in yet another way? Eleven seemed a bit young to care about that sort of thing but on the other hand, Ginny had started crushing on him at a younger age in his home dimension and so had Cassie here. So... whatever made her happy, he supposed. And it guaranteed she wouldn't end up with Ron again, which was a definite plus. He just hoped they had different taste in women, because he didn't relish the idea of competing with someone who had the head start of actually knowing how a woman's mind worked.

Another important thing he had picked upon, though, was that Hermione was still an academically gifted student even though she enjoyed sports. And punching people who wronged her. What an interesting combination. Harry had a feeling that he would never find himself bored if he stuck around her. Mind made up, Harry leaned forward and grinned. "Yeah, magic can be bloody brilliant

sometimes. Alright, what did you want to know about quidditch? I'm no Ludo Bagman, but I know my share."

Opening her trunk, Hermione grabbed a book out of the top before closing it and lifting it up onto the luggage rack. Dropping back into her seat, she opened *Quidditch Through the Ages* and leafed through the pages before turning it so Harry could see. "Well first of all... did I read this right? Have the Chudley Cannons really not had a winning season in over a century?"

Harry shook his head. "Close. They've had winning seasons, as in they've had at least one more win than loss, but they haven't won the League Cup in that long."

Staring at him with wide eyes, Hermione let out a low whistle. "Wow. That's bloody pathetic."

"Pretty much, yeah." A knock on the window disrupted their conversation and Harry raised an eyebrow at the new arrivals: Su had finally shown her face and she'd brought along a pair of familiar faces: Daphne Greengrass and Tracey Of-No-Surname. Motioning for her to open the door, Harry rose to his feet and pulled out the pocket watch Lily had snuck him; his father owned several but only used one, so she didn't reckon he'd miss it. "Huh. It only took you an hour and sixteen minutes to find me, assuming you got on the train just as it pulled away. Did they magically add some cars when I wasn't looking?"

Su rolled her eyes before gesturing to her trunk and owl cage, which Harry magically levitated up to rest next to his own. "Funny. No, I decided to poke around for a bit, see if I could make a few friends not named Harry Potter. Nothing. Did you know there's only one other Chinese girl on the entire train, and I've only seen half a dozen other students who aren't white? It's like the school forgot minorities exist." Slipping past Harry, she moved to sit between Hermione and the window before nodding in the direction of the two quiet redheads still standing in the doorway. "I ran into them while I was looking and figured that since you're not exactly the crowd type, you'd probably have room for more in your compartment."

Shaking his head, Harry was about to invite them in when he remembered his current companion. Looking over at Hermione, he raised an eyebrow and nodded in their direction, causing her to

shrug. Right then. Well if Hermione didn't mind and he obviously didn't have a problem with them riding in the compartment... "Daphne, Tracey, you've met Su and I obviously. This is Hermione Granger. Do you need help with your trunks or anything?" The pair looked at each other, looked back at him, and shook their heads perfectly in sync. Each drew their wand and with a muttered Levitation Charm, their trunks lifted into the air and floated over to rest in the luggage rack. That done, they looked around the compartment slowly before meeting each other's eyes again. Some sort of silent communication took place between them, reminding him almost of the Weasley twins, and then Daphne brushed past him, grabbing his wrist and pulling him along behind her as she took the window seat and then pulled him down beside her. As soon as he was settled, Tracey took up the spot on his other side. He offered each a bemused smile. "Well, I lost my window seat but at least I'll get to know the two of you better."

"No, you lost the window seat and I don't have to worry about Tracey bugging me from here to Hogsmeade because she's too polite to try talking across another person." Ignoring Tracey's indignant huff, Daphne leaned forward and offered Hermione her hand. "Daphne Greengrass, heiress presumptive of the Noble and Most Ancient House of Greengrass." Reaching out, Hermione shook the girl's hand, looking utterly confused all the while, but when Harry made no move to explain things to her, Daphne eventually took pity on the brunette. "Inheritance positions are a big thing with purebloods. Being heiress presumptive means that unless my mother has a son between now and when my father dies, I stand to inherit. Harry here, on the other hand, would be the heir apparent of the Noble and Most Ancient House of Potter because he's the oldest son of the only son."

Hermione let out a soft 'oh' before narrowing her eyes at Daphne. "You're not one of those snobby purebloods who would call a muggleborn a 'mudblood', are you? Because I already punched one for doing it and if I'm going to end up having to punch you, Harry should probably have some warning so he knows to move over a bit."

After staring at Hermione for a few seconds, Daphne threw her head back and laughed. "Let me guess, you're the real reason that Longbottom looks like he tried to snog a bludger?" Hermione nodded, making Daphne shake her head in amusement. "He's

running around telling people he got punched by an older Slytherin. But no, I'm not into all that blood purity stuff. My father used to be, but a decade of being yelled at by mother and stepmother has beaten it out of him." Harry's brow furrowed as he tried to figure out the implications of what she'd just said before shaking his head; her family situation wasn't his business and if she wanted him to know, she'd tell him. "Anyways, I'm Daphne and on Harry's other side is Tracey Davis. Not a heiress at all."

Tracey just rolled her eyes at that. "Yes, and if our father had met my mother a few weeks sooner, I might have a claim to that inheritance of yours even if I am the illegitimate one. And besides, it's not like you actually inherit anything. Being the 'heiress presumptive' just means you're the one whose husband gets all the money and land someday when Father dies. Which makes you the one who has to get a husband - or get sold off to a husband of Father's choosing - while I can marry whoever I want when the time comes. So no thank you. You can have your heiress-ness."

"...and there go chances of us keeping the half-sister thing quiet until Big Mouth starts Hogwarts in two years." Daphne groaned, burying her face in her hands for a moment before straightening up. "Long story short, Father married Aunt Claudia in the muggle world and my mother in the magical world, and splits his time between Hampstead and Greengrass Manor in Woodbridge. The houses are both connected to the floo so Tracey, Tori, and I just sorta float back and forth between the two at will." Looking back and forth between the two girls, Harry could almost see it. Well, it had to be true if they were actually coming out and saying it because who would lie about such a thing, but the more he looked, the more things he found that convinced him he might have realized the truth on his own. Their hair and eyes were different colors with a common medium ground: Daphne was a strawberry blonde with teal eyes and Tracey possessed reddish brown hair and olive eyes. Mister Greengrass, Harry theorized, more than likely shared his mother's coloration. Their cheekbones and lips were both similarly shaped and... actually, all their similarities were located above the neck. Daphne was shorter and slimmer than her half-sister, while Tracey not only carried a bit more weight overall but was already visibly developing. "There's more to the story than my father wanting to be stuck supporting two wives and three children spread over two houses in two worlds, but that's not for sharing until I get to know you better."

Despite his own curiosity - such as why Tara avoided using Tracey's surname when she clearly had one - Harry decided to respect Daphne's wishes. The question was, did he let the conversation die for now or try to redirect it into safer territory? He thought about several different potential topics before settling on one that would either result in them talking about something he could participate in or - more than likely - band them together in a synchronized huff about 'boys!' and launch a conversation about how juvenile his sex was. But hey, at least then they'd be talking and becoming friends and he could go back to his book. "So, does anyone else here like quidditch? Hermione was having problems accepting how pathetic the Cannons are. Me, I root for the Falmouth Falcons."

Harry knew immediately that he'd made an egregious error when not only Su but Daphne's eyes lit up, prompting a groan from Tracey. Shucking her black outer robe, Daphne revealed not the Hogwarts uniform that Harry was expecting, but an ankle length bottle green skirt and matching shirt with a golden talon emblazoned over her heart. "Holyhead Harpies. Father has season tickets for three and so the six of us rotate as to who gets to go. Well, five of us; Tracey never wants to come. What about you, Su?"

"Hong Kong Huli Jing. I should probably find a new team to root for while I'm in England, though."

Letting out another groan, Tracey leaned to rest her forehead on Harry's shoulder as Daphne began extolling the virtues of the Harpies. "Oh, this is going to be a fun ride..."

When the train finally rolled in to the station near Hogsmeade, Harry disembarked first before offering each girl a hand as she stepped down onto the platform. As his fellow first years gathered around, it just reinforced the feeling of oddness that had set in that morning. Being surrounded by miniature versions of people he'd seen grow into young adults - with a few exceptions - was just bloody odd.

Neville was a prime example. No matter how hard Harry looked, not a single trace of either the shy, plump boy from first year or the confident young man of their seventh remained. This Neville was a chubby, dark-haired Draco Malfoy, except his claim to fame was a scar on his head instead of familial riches and a well-positioned father. Parvati was another; the younger of the Patil twins

intermittently tugging at her sister's braid as they walked along. And... his intelligence wasn't going to be as accurate as he'd hoped. Even beyond the potential for people who were the same on the outside and different on the inside, the girl with reddish-brown hair was one of a handful of strangers wearing pure black robes. A handful that included the girl he suspected was this world's version of Ron.

Speaking of Draco, at least he wouldn't be dealing with him here. Harry's eyes sought out Tara's platinum blonde mane, following her as she and Pansy passed in front of him. For the longest time, he'd thought - and planned around the assumption - that Draco and Tara were fraternal twins, each gravitating toward their same-gendered parent. Perhaps he should have asked, come to think of it, especially given how much time he spent talking to Narcissa. But unless Lucius had seen fit to floo straight to Hogsmeade with Draco or something and the ponce was waiting for them up at the school... Harry had watched Platform Nine and Three-Quarters carefully. No Lucius and no Draco. True, he had to deal with this obnoxious new Neville, but at least he didn't have to deal with Draco and Neville.

"Firs' years! Firs' years over here!" Hagrid's booming voice echoed over the platform, freezing most of the first years in their tracks. Rolling his eyes, Harry gestured for his friends to follow him as he headed towards the half-giant; sure Hagrid looked intimidating, but Harry knew he was a big teddy bear on the inside. "C'mon, follow me... any more firs' years? Mind yer step, now! Firs' years follow me!" Eventually all the students took their lead from Harry, following along like ducklings as Hagrid led them down a path through the woods towards the lake. "Yeh'll get yer firs' sight o' Hogwarts in a sec, jus' round this bend here." There were gasps and appreciative noises as Hagrid led them out onto a narrow beach that separated the woods from the large lake, gesturing with his umbrella to the row of boats sitting on the shore. "No more'n four to a boat!"

With a chorus of low murmurs, the students began splitting into groups for the boat ride across the lake. The quintet looked at each other before shrugging and heading towards the furthest boat. After all, the five of them combined probably weighed less than Hagrid and he was going across the lake in a boat. As soon as they were all loaded, there was a gentle bump and the boats began pulling away from the shore. There wasn't much to see, it being night and all, and so Harry closed his eyes and let the sounds of his boatmates' quiet

chatter wash over him. Sometime in the next half an hour or so, he'd be finding out who he'd be spending the next ten months a year for seven years with. But that was then. For now, he could do nothing but wait and relax. And so he did.

As they congregated outside the Great Hall, waiting for Professor McGonagall to lead them inside, Harry shook his head as it sank in... there were a lot of boys in his class alone. And he'd really known two in his entire time at Hogwarts: Ron Weasley and Neville Longbottom, the latter entering his life around fifth year. Similarly, apart from the late additions of Luna, Lara, Daphne, and finally Su, his only real female friends had been Hermione and Ginny. Before their post-war transformations, at any rate. Okay, he'd had the Weasley Twins too, but the point stood. He'd been so screwed out of a social life by associating with the two biggest losers in his year, it wasn't even funny.

Further ponderings were cut off as McGonagall appeared and led the crowd of nervous first years into the Great Hall. When she reached the front of the room, she gestured for the group to stop and peeled off to retrieve the stool and Sorting Hat. Its appearance caused his peers to burst into whispered conversation, while Harry opted to pay attention to those near him. After all, he'd already been here and seen this. One thing he did notice was that Daphne was shivering, something that had started during their trek across the lake, and he debated for a moment before motioning for her to approach. She hesitated before moving to stand beside him and Harry casually threw an arm around her shoulders, making her tense up. Leaning in, he lowered his voice so he wouldn't be overheard. "I don't want to be seen casting anything during the sorting." That made Daphne relax marginally, and then his Warming Charm swirled around her and she melted against his side as his spell chased the chill away.

Listening to the Sorting Hat's song with half an ear, Harry sighed in relief when it turned out to be the same as the first time around. He knew from the past that the Sorting Hat could react to the changing circumstances of the magical world, and had half expected something referencing a dimensional traveler or the wielder of an imitation Deathstick to pop up in the song. But his secret was still safe it appeared. Stepping forward, McGonagall called up Hannah Abbott and the Sorting Hat was placed onto her head. "Hufflepuff!"

Her tie and tights both went from solely black to alternating bands of yellow and black, and Hannah rushed off to join her new housemates at the Hufflepuff table.

"Bones, Susan!"

"Hufflepuff!"

The next two went just the way Harry remembered, with both Terry Boot and Mandy Brocklehurst being sorted into Ravenclaw. But instead of Lavender Brown following Mandy, an unfamiliar boy with brown hair moved to sit on the stool... when Professor McGonagall called 'Brown, Lawrence'. Huh. Harry's eyes wandered over to Tara. Evidently she wasn't a unique case here. And that meant the redheaded girl probably was the Ron of this world. How very amusing.

Millicent Bulstrode followed Lawrence and quickly became the first Slytherin of the year, and was followed into the house of serpents by the two unfamiliar students who came next: Maeve Campbell, the girl with reddish-brown hair who he'd first seen on the train, and a black-haired boy named Mimas Carrow who barely had the Hat touch his head before being declared a Slytherin. Harry narrowed his eyes as he watched the boy move to sit at the end of the Slytherin table, taking a seat beside a pair of slightly older twin girls who might have been sisters or cousins. He'd killed two Carrows so far. Was Mimas related to either? Was he going to be Harry's Draco this time around?

The herd slowly thinned as one at a time, each first year sat on the three-legged stool and took their turn beneath the Sorting Hat. Eventually it was Tracey's turn and as she slowly walked to the front of the Great Hall, Harry thought back on his conversations with the girls in his compartment that afternoon. There was no way Hermione was going anywhere but Gryffindor and Su would probably follow suit. Which meant his idea of bringing the two of them with him to Ravenclaw was probably shot. Oh well. He'd survive, especially given Gryffindor would have a distinct lack of Ron this time around. The only uncertainties remaining were where the half-sisters would end up, and how that would impact his hopes for... "Ravenclaw!"

Harry blinked as Tracey's uniform acquired blue and bronze accents, offering her a reassuring smile as she slid off the stool and moved to

join her new housemates. As much as he wanted them all to stay together, he reasoned, it was for the best. She would, after all, provide a set of eyes in a second house at minimum. His mind went to work, retooling his plans accordingly to compensate for both this latest development and the personalities of what appeared to be his first four friends at Hogwarts this time around, even as he watched a string of five boys pass beneath the Sorting Hat: a Gryffindor, two Ravenclaws, a Hufflepuff, and another Slytherin. Then it was Hermione's turn to approach the stool and sit beneath the Sorting Hat.

"Gryffindor!"

Not a surprise, really, especially given how feisty this version was compared to the original. Daphne was the next to sit beneath the Sorting Hat and someone on high either liked him or hated him, Harry wasn't sure which, because Daphne soon followed the muggleborn over to the Gryffindor table, taking the seat across from her. While Harry couldn't quite bring himself to be unhappy about her being in the house he'd presumably end up in, it did put a dent in his plan of an intelligence network that spanned all four houses.

The sorting continued, one aberration coming when Megan Jones was sorted into Gryffindor instead of Hufflepuff, and Neville somehow managed to make it into Gryffindor despite his rather Malfoy-esque personality. Two students later, the real Malfoy went beneath the Hat and Tara was sent off to Slytherin. Well, he hadn't wanted to use her as his point of contact... but beggars couldn't be choosers. It was either her, Millicent, make friends with that Maeve girl, get to know Ráichéal...

"Hufflepuff!"

...or maybe Ráichéal wasn't an option, Harry mused, watching the Irish girl move to join her yellow and black-clad housemates. Pansy was an option, maybe; they weren't friends but the semi-positive first encounter at his house for tea might give him an in. He watched her go to Slytherin, Padma to Ravenclaw, and then Parvati ascended to sit on the stool. And sit. And sit. Finally, the Sorting Hat came to a decision. "Slytherin!"

Huh. Well there was another option if he didn't want to involve his cousin in his plans.

"Perks, Sally-Anne."

"Hufflepuff!"

"Potter, Harry."

After waiting a moment, Harry shook his head and remembered that nobody would be pointing and whispering here. He was just Harry, not the Boy-Who-Lived. Moving up to sit on the chair, Harry felt the hat touch his head and waited. After a moment of silence, he realized what the problem probably was and carefully lowered his occulmency shields before reaching out with his mind. 'So, out of curiosity, can we just accept the first Sorting Hat's judgment here and put me back in Gryffindor? I'm so hungry I could eat a hippocamp.'

'Funny, Mister Potter. Maybe I will take the other Sorting Hat's judgment... and put you straight into Slytherin where you belong. Is that what you'd like?' Harry cringed; the wizarding world was going to have a hard enough time with a person whose power greatly outstripped that of its 'savior'. Going into the house of dark wizards would only make it worse. Fuck. 'Language, Mister Potter. No, you are still mostly a Gryffindor at heart... although you've picked up more Slytherin traits as of late than most people would expect a Gryffindor to possess. Picking friends based on their usefulness, for one.'

Harry's heart raced; this wasn't going anything at all like he'd anticipated. He absolutely could not be a Slytherin. He'd be cut off from Hermione and Daphne at a minimum due to house rivalry, and nobody would trust that anything he did was altruistic, rather than due to a hidden selfish ambition. 'Not just for their uses. Their personalities matter too. I don't want another Ron on my hands, after all. But is it really wrong of me to not want to end up carrying dead weight, especially with what I know is coming?'

'Mmm. And considering their future looks?'

'I'm male. So hex me.'

'Right. Well, as reluctant as I am - that patronus of yours is as clear a sign of any as where I should be sending you - you may be the

lesser of two evils. After seeing into the Longbottom boy's mind, I fear for the future of this world. They will need you, Harry Potter, when the world falls down around them. They will turn to you and cry out for the savior that Longbottom cannot be. And you will be that savior. It's who you are. You can do no less. But in this narrow-minded world they have built, you cannot be a savior unless you come from...' The Hat twitched again on Harry's head. "Gryffindor!"

Whipping the hat off his head and putting it on the chair, Harry hurried over to sit next to Daphne, giving Hermione a nod and a smile. The strawberry blonde immediately leaned in, nodding towards where Su Li was standing with the seven other students who still needed to be sorted. "I thought she was Su Li. Last name being Li?" Harry nodded slowly; they'd gone over that when the girls introduced themselves at his house. "Then why wasn't she sorted before Longbottom?"

"Because the school saw Li Su and assumed her last name was Su. And she figured if they were going to let an 'ignorant yáng guǐzi' address the Hogwarts letters, she was going to take advantage of it to make sure she was sorted after the Patils so she could be where Parvati wasn't. She met them at Madam Malkin's and wasn't too impressed." They watched as Joseph Roberts went to Ravenclaw, Zacharias Smith returned to Hufflepuff, and then Su comma Li was called forth to sit beneath the Hat. "With her plan and some of the other things she's said, I'm guessing Slytherin..." Which meant she could be his eyes in that house, come to think of it...

"Gryffindor!"

"...but I've been wrong before." Su bounced over and took up the seat remaining on Harry's left and the quartet watched as Tara's Welsh friend Branwen joined the Hufflepuffs. Dean was sorted next and became a Gryffindor, followed by Lisa Turpin going to Ravenclaw, and 'Anne Weasley' becoming the fifth Gryffindor girl. Blaise Zabini was the last to be sorted and became the final Slytherin, and the stool and Hat were hustled off as Dumbledore rose to his feet. A short speech later, food hit the table and conversation fell by the wayside as everyone 'tucked in'.

Dinner was a bit odd for Harry; he'd been isolated amongst the Weasleys rather than spending time with his peers the first time and they'd all treated him a bit worshipfully, although that had quickly

worn off in the case of the twins. With Hermione, Su, and Daphne, there was joking, idle chatter in between bites of food... Su even felt daring enough to use a fork to poach a carrot off his plate. Nobody would have dared do that in his old world. It felt... normal. Good, even. He was by far the quietest of the quartet, though, busy thinking both about the secrets he held - Tara could be called upon to be a bonder for an Unbreakable Vow but did he want to disclose his secrets or lie and, in the case of the former, how soon - and the problems that would be coming his way over the next few years.

Obviously, he couldn't simply accuse Quirrell of having Voldemort sticking out of the back of his head and let things go from there. Not only would it tip his hand as to his unnatural knowledge, but Harry would look like quite a fool if this was another Tara situation and the universe was different. Maybe Snape was Voldemort's vessel. Maybe Quirrell would still do it but was nothing more than a willing servant. Maybe one of the other teachers had gotten possessed. The possibilities were endless.

Second year would be obvious and yet complicated: all he had to do was locate the diary horcrux... but who knew who would end up with it. If Malfoy was smarter in this dimension, he'd target a neutral family or even use one of his daughter's future housemates rather than drop it in the cauldron of a family who'd sent every member into Gryffindor for the last few centuries. That assumed Lucius was smarter here, though. So it could be very simple or very hard, and he wouldn't know until next fall. Joy.

After that came third year... would Pettigrew escape Azkaban like Sirius had? What were those crimes the book hadn't listed? Would he come after anyone in the castle? Not only would Longbottom be there - assuming he hadn't flunked out or died by then - but so would Harry, his younger sisters, and Sirius's daughter Cassie. If Peter held a grudge against his two former best friends, they'd all present good targets for revenge.

Fourth year... he knew what he had to do in his fourth year. Nobody would die in the second war if there was no second war. He would either enter as the fourth champion again, find a way to make his way in as Hogwarts's real champion, or sneak into the maze and grab the cup first. But Voldemort would die in Little Hangleton that night, Harry was certain of it.

After dinner, dessert, and Dumbledore's announcements - including the 'most painful death' bit about a certain corridor - Percy Weasley and a girl his age with blonde hair, a smattering of brown freckles, glasses, and a bright smile descended on them. "First years, follow us! My name is Percy Weasley and I shall be your fifth year prefect this year. Please, stay with us, the hallways can be very confusing and I don't want any of you getting lost on your first night."

"Oh, lighten up, Percy. It's not like they can lose sight of that bright red mop of yours." The girl's grin widened as most of the first years laughed, herding from behind to keep them moving after Percy as they ascended the moving stairs towards where Gryffindor Tower was. "My name is Cherise Cram, and I'm your other fifth year prefect. Between the two of us, we can answer any question you have or solve almost any problem you need... but girls, I recommend coming to me if you have feminine issues unless you want to see a boy's face turn Gryffindor red."

After a lengthy hike and the requisite explanation of the portrait system and an introduction to the Fat Lady, the new Gryffindors were led into their common room and guided over to one corner full of sofas and chairs. Why quickly became evident. "Right then. Just so you know, every year the prefects sit the first years down and we go around and introduce ourselves so we can start getting to know each other." Percy puffed up, rubbing the sleeve of his robe against his prefect badge. "I'll go first, just to start things off. My name is Percy Weasley. I'm the third of seven children, and oldest of the four currently at Hogwarts. My brothers Fred and George are third years, and Anne is sitting among you. Next year, our sister Ginny will be joining us. I hope to become Head Boy, then go on to work at the Ministry of Magic. Cherise?"

Cherise grinned and dropped onto the sofa between Su and Daphne, leaning back and kicking her feet up on a nearby coffee table with her legs carefully crossed for modesty reasons. "I'm Cherise Cram. Still, just like five minutes ago. I have a fraternal twin sister in Hufflepuff named Janae. We don't look much alike but if you want to earn some serious brownie points with me, walk up to her and pretend you think she's me. It winds her up so much it's hilarious. Unlike Percy, I don't have my whole life planned out yet and so when I graduate, I just plan to go somewhere and do... something."

From there, since the group was divided among gender lines with Harry and Hermione sitting together on a two-seater and forming the border between the two sexes, they got to hear about the utterly enthralling lives of Seamus, 'Larry', Dean, and Neville, including a particularly bad and overly dramatic account of how the latter supposedly survived the Killing Curse.

Then all eyes turned to Harry, and he sighed. Bugger.

Joe's Note: I'm going to use the real world calendar for 2001 in this, meaning Harry arrived at Hogwarts on a Saturday and then will have all of Sunday off before starting classes on Monday, September 3rd. Oh, and I nuked a good-sized scene here, which was essentially the original author beating off about how many friends-with-benefits Harry had, basically amounting to every light side-affiliated female in his immediate age group. Oh, he dumped Cho but bent her over a few times, Fleur was his sex toy, yadda yadda yadda. Yeah, let's not and say we did, hmm? Strangely enough, I don't feel like I've lost anything by removing either the scene or the idea of Harry being an utter manwhore. Anyone disagree?

"My name is Harry Potter... and you know, I wish my parents had warned me this was coming. I would have written a speech or something." He was honestly stymied for the first time since coming back. What did he say to make himself sound like a semi-average eleven-year-old boy? Without coming off as boorish or uninteresting - or both, in one notable case - as the other boys had?

Leaning across Daphne and Hermione, Cherise patted Harry on the arm reassuringly. "This isn't your OWLs, Harry. Just relax and be yourself."

Giving the prefect a small smile and a nod, Harry thought for a moment before deciding on a brief summary that would give away precious little about him, forcing people to come to him and get genuine first impressions instead of forming it here. "Right then. My name is Harry Potter and I'm from Perranarworthal in Cornwall. My favorite colors are black, gold, and green. My father is a pureblood and my mother is a muggleborn; they were the Head Boy and Girl for the Class of '88. I like quidditch, reading, and I've been learning cooking from my mother because I have twin younger sisters who she was making help her and anything they touched turned out horrible. And I'm a growing boy, so a table full of food I can't eat is a crime." There was scattered laughter and Harry furrowed his brow; was there anything else he should tell them? Not that he could think of. Turning to the brunette beside him, Harry gestured for her to proceed. "Hermione?"

Hermione was busy glaring at Neville, who was staring back at her with wide eyes, evidently just finally noticing the presence of his abuser from the train. After a moment, she scoffed and looked away,

turning her attention to Cherise. "My name is Hermione Granger and I'm a muggleborn from Winchester. I'm looking forward to Transfiguration and Defense Against the Dark Arts because they seem like the most exciting disciplines of magic. I want to learn how to fly and play quidditch, and back home I was the goalkeeper for my school's field hockey team."

While that didn't seem to mean much to most of the group, Dean gave a start at that and so did Megan. "Wow. You play field hockey? So did my sister but she had to give it up because she broke her leg one too many times and it didn't heal right." Deciding her outburst was a good enough reason to jump the line, she turned to the others and waved. "I'm Megan Jones, by the way. Pleased to meet you. Also a muggleborn, if you didn't pick up on that on your own. And if you can't figure it out from the accent, I'm Welsh. From Swansea, to be specific. I don't really have a favorite subject yet because I didn't get to Diagon Alley until two days ago because my family was too busy to make the trip from Swansea to London. I've always loved helping my mam in the garden, though, so maybe Herbology. Although if it's anything like normal gardening and we end up kneeling in the dirt, I'm going to be very glad we spent the extra bit of money to get the Evans Charm on all my skirts."

That grabbed Harry's attention. While he couldn't be certain, it hadn't sounded like Megan had included an apostrophe in that... making it the Evans Charm, not Evan's Charm. And what was the likelihood of another magical person sharing his muggleborn mother's maiden name? "The Evans Charm?"

Megan rose to her feet, as did Hermione. The two looked at each other before grinning and drawing their wands, each tapping the tip of hers against a seemingly featureless spot on the waistband of her skirt. "Real women wear trousers." Anne, Daphne, and Cherise let out indignant huffs at that even as Harry watched in fascination, the two girls' black uniform skirts morphing into slacks identical to the ones he was wearing. "The patriarchy is keeping me down." The trousers became skirts once more and the two girls retook their seats, ignoring the looks the other girls and even a few of the boys were giving them.

Personally, Harry found it all quite intriguing. He knew his mother was a genius with charms, from mentions by others even before coming to this universe, but he'd never even thought to ask what

she'd done with the ten years of life she gained in this new world. He probably should have, he realized. Maybe there were other, more useful spells wandering around in that brilliant mind of hers that he could put to good use.

Dismissing those thoughts as contemplations for another time, Harry half-listened to Anne Weasley ramble on about life in Ottery St. Catchpole with five older brothers and a younger sister before tuning back in as the attention turned to the former eagle and snake now in lions' clothing. The pair looked at each other across Cherise, each gesturing for the other to proceed, before Hermione leaned across two laps and jabbed Su in the ribs with her wand, prodding the diminutive girl into speaking. "Eep. Alright then. My name is Li Su. For those of you who've never met someone actually from China, that means my given name is Su and my family name is Li. Still, we're not that different. Unless we're friends, you're not allowed to call me Su, so just call me Li and you'll probably get an answer. I was born in Shanghai but when I'm in England, I live in Harwich in Essex. My parents are the current owners of a very successful import business - which means they get paid to find and bring stuff from around the world to Britain so you can spend your money on it - and when I graduate, I'm going to work for them."

There were a few confused murmurs as she finished but Su didn't seem inclined to clarify anything, leaving Daphne as the lone holdout from their little sharing session. "Daphne Greengrass, pureblood, from Woodbridge in Suffolk. Since she doesn't seem to care about keeping it a secret, I might as well admit that Tracey Davis is my half-sister; she was sorted into Ravenclaw tonight, if you weren't paying attention. I'm the end of line for two houses through my father, including being the heir presumptive of the Noble and Most Ancient House of Greengrass, and a third through my mother. So I'll probably be either engaged or married by the time we graduate and after that I'll settle into the life of a proper manor housewife: raise a child or two, organize dinners and parties, and so forth and so on. I know that freaks you muggleborns out, but that's how our world works and so I'm just being realistic."

"Three houses, eh? Including a Noble and Most Ancient one?" Neville grinned and leaned forward in his seat. "Well, I'll have you know that the Noble and Most Ancient House of Longbot..."

Daphne narrowed her eyes, jabbing her wand forward. "Stupefy!" A jet of red light caught Neville right in the face, throwing him back in his chair so hard it tipped over, spilling him onto the floor. While not particularly impressive in the grand scheme of things, the fact that Daphne could perform that spell so well as a first year was decidedly noteworthy. Everyone looked at Daphne in disbelief, the strawberry blonde glaring at Neville's fallen form as she tucked her wand away. "By the time we graduate. I'm eleven right now for one, and your family couldn't afford me for another." She looked around at her peers. "Anyone else want to make an early offer?"

Checking his watch, Harry shook his head. "Perhaps another time, Daphne. The house elves may move our stuff around with magic, but that doesn't mean accidents can't happen and I want to go check on my things." Hopping to his feet, he decided he felt a little playful and gave a bow to the first year girls. "Ladies." Harry reached out, grabbing Cherise's hand so he could plant a kiss on the back. "Miss Cram. Until tomorrow."

Harry grinned as he walked away, feeling eyes on his back and hearing whispering involving his name for the first time since he'd arrived in this world. And unlike most times in his life, it was for something he actually did. It was a refreshing feeling. The noise fell off as he entered the first year dorm, although it quickly returned as the other four boys in his year piled in after him, Neville being carried by the other three. Rolling his eyes, Harry drew his wand and surreptitiously revived Neville. The boy thrashed, causing the others to drop him, and looked around in surprise. "Whah? Huh?"

"Daphne stunned you for being a twit." Harry grinned and grabbed his trunk from the stack in the middle of the room, pondering for a moment before grabbing the same bed as in his old universe. It was the perfect location in his opinion: neither too close nor too far from the fire, and not next to the door so he could sleep in on weekends while his roommates got up and went about their plans for the day. "Was pretty funny, if you ask me. Right in the face at point blank range."

Growling, Neville struggled to his feet and pulled out his wand. "First that mudblood Granger back on the train and now this. Did you know they had to have Madam Pomfrey apparate onto the train an hour out so she could fix my teeth back up?" Rolling up his sleeves,

he stomped toward the door. "I don't care if they are girls. Nobody treats Neville Longbottom like that and gets away with it!"

Harry narrowed his eyes. Even if he hadn't possessed a soft spot when it came to the girls in question, not only did he loathe the word mudblood, but violence against women was completely unacceptable in his book. Well, except for that time he'd cursed Bellatrix Lestrange to hell and back before ending her life. And the time he'd killed Alecto Carrow. But did either of those beasts really count as women? Oh, and there was the matter of his duel with Cissy, but that had been self-defense on his end and she hadn't really been hurt by it. Much. At any rate... "I don't think so, Longbottom. Now put your wand away before you get hurt. Again."

"And who do you think's going to hurt me? You?" Neville laughed and tapped his wand against his forehead. "I'm the Boy-Who-Lived. You're just the son of a mudblood and a whiny pureblood auror, according to my father. I got an exception from the Minister himself to begin learning magic last year. You don't stand a chance against..."

"Expelliarmus."

The spell caught Neville in the back, spinning him around like a top and dumping him to the floor as his wand was ripped out of his hand. Cherise caught it neatly and tucked it into the waistband of her skirt before gathering her blonde curls up into a bun and shoving her own wand through it to hold it in place. "I was just coming up here to see if Longbottom needed to be revived. Looks like I turned up just in time. Longbottom, ten points from Gryffindor for inappropriate language and threatening harm to your housemates. I'll be turning your wand over to Professor McGonagall when the prefects meet with her in a few minutes; you can explain yourself to her when you decide you want it back. If you need help with anything, talk to the second years or the three non-Weasley third years. And on that note... goodnight, boys. Harry."

Being singled out - and the little smile that accompanied his name - made Harry raise an eyebrow, but he shrugged it off as Cherise departed and closed the door behind herself. After watching the other three boys help Neville to his feet, Harry waited for the attention to inevitably return to him before raising his right hand and flicking his wrist, causing his wand to jump into his hand. "You're

lucky I saw her behind you, Longbottom. She was a lot nicer than I would have been." Turning away, he walked back towards his bed. "Besides, Hermione already knocked out your teeth and Daphne stunned you. Do you really want to pick a fight with either of them a second time? If I'd lost to a girl once, I'd be embarrassed. If I'd lost twice, especially in one day, I'd be humiliated. I wouldn't be trying for a third time."

After casting a few protective charms around his bed as the others went back to fawning over Neville, Harry opened his trunk and dug around for a few minutes before finding the book he was looking for. A quick inspection showed the rest of his possessions had survived the journey unbroken and so after closing, locking, and applying a few charms to his trunk as well, he crawled up to rest with his back against the headboard and opened his copy of *Snogging Seductresses: Things I Learned From the World's Most Provocative Magical Species*. And if this was another case of Lockhart and this 'Selene Shagwell' woman was just making up her adventures? Especially given the moving photograph of her on the back flap of the dust jacket? Harry didn't want to know about it.

Apart from the obvious allure of such a book, Harry was finding the information inside genuinely interesting. Selene had literally traveled the entire world, meeting and interviewing dryads, huldra, huli jing, kitsune, sidhe, sirens, succubi, and even an all-female clan of vampires that seduced their prey and took enough to survive but never killed. Veela, though, were of particular interest because of the upcoming - in a way - Triwizard Tournament, to say nothing of Anastasiya and Cassie. And what he'd found so far shocked him.

Here, it turned out Anastasiya's wheat blonde hair wasn't dark for a veela, but rather light. Originating in the central and eastern regions of Europe, 'baseline' veela possessed either dark brown or black hair, rather than the silvery-blond he'd become accustomed to from Fleur's presence during the war effort. Veela actually possessed a peculiar mix of dominant and recessive genes... and Harry had been rather amazed that a witch had known enough about muggle science to even mention something like that. Unlike his original universe, there were no half or quarter veela here; all girls born to veela mothers were veela, while all boys were simply human boys - albeit with a tendency to be a bit on the 'pretty' side. Their appearance genes, however, were largely recessive so apart from being 'pretty' as a rule, Veela tended to breed into the local

population so that each successive generation looked more and more like the native people, until they were distinguished from the normal humans only by their fantastic beauty. And while the veela of this world had retained their allure, as was evident from his encounters with Anastasiya, they held mastery over storms and nature rather than fire. Not just offensively, either: some veela were known to possess the power to heal someone just by laying their hands on the sick person, and Selene had even met a veela who possessed prophetic abilities.

Idly wondering what abilities Fleur and Gabrielle - and Cassie, for that matter - possessed in this universe, Harry flipped to the next page and continued reading about, small world, Selene's wanderings in eastern Europe and her encounter with a trio of young veela named Anastasiya, Lena, and Yulia. In Ukraine. While it wasn't an uncommon name in the area according to his aunt... why take the chance? Granted Anastasiya was a pretty woman but she was his godfather's woman and there were just some things one didn't want to know about their family members. Skimming forward until her name stopped appearing, Harry perked up as a section on Selene's travels in Bulgaria began. If the Quidditch World Cup was anything to go by, they had some bloody gorgeous veela.

Plus he wasn't actually related to any of them.

"Right then. There are three rooms. That means four of us will be spread over the first two rooms and someone gets their own. Does anyone want to volunteer to be in a double or should we just put slips of paper in a hat and start drawing?"

If there was one thing her parents had taught her how to do well, Altaira Malfoy mused, it was how to seize control of the rabble and guide them to the destination she desired for them. But while her father fancied himself a master of the art, his abilities paled in comparison to those possessed by Narcissa Malfoy. She was a virtuoso in the fine arts of manipulation and control, manipulator of the manipulator. And at her right hand, Tara had learned a great many things that would serve her well in Slytherin. Starting right now.

Pansy sent her beseeching looks but after Tara failed to so much as blink at her - Pansy was a dear, but she wasn't going to voluntarily give up that much extra space for her - the black-haired girl huffed

and turned to Millicent. "Want to room together? If there's a four out of five chance I'm going to end up getting paired with someone, it might as well be someone I know." The larger girl let out a grunt and shrugged before grabbing the handle of her own trunk in one hand and Pansy's in the other. Waving, Pansy opened the door to the leftmost room and the two disappeared inside to settle in.

And then there were three. After a moment, an idea came to Tara and she opened her trunk, slipping her hand into her money bag and retrieving a single galleon. "Why don't we flip for it? Parvati, you and I go first. The winner will go on to face Maeve and the loser goes in the double. Maeve, obviously you'll face one of us and if you win, you get the solo room. If you lose, you go with the other loser in the double. Sound fair?" The two girls looked at each other, shrugged ambivalently, and then turned back to Tara. "Good. Parvati, head or dragon? And I have to say, I love your name. Very pretty and exotic. My mother just took the name of a star and stuck an A on the end of it to get mine."

"Thanks. It's the name of the goddess who was Shiva's second consort. Um... dragon, I think." Tara held out the galleon so Parvati could inspect it before pulling out her wand and using it to hover the coin a few inches over her palm. A whispered spell her mother had taught her just for this occasion - because people tended to accept losing better if they thought they'd actually had a chance at succeeding, according to her - sent the coin spinning end over end, creating a blurry golden ball that hovered over her palm. Parvati chanted 'dragon' softly under her breath as the coin began to slow, her eager expression morphing into a pout when the flipping coin stopped with Merlin's head facing upward. "Drat. Oh well. Maeve, your turn."

As Parvati collected her trunk and moved towards the room on the right, Maeve moved forward and used her finger to slowly rotate the floating coin. "Hmm. You're a Malfoy. My parents have told me what your family's like. I wouldn't put it past you to have a way of controlling that spell so the side you want always comes up. But then if I insist on doing it myself... I'd have to flip it the old-fashioned way and then you can make fun of me for doing it 'the muggle way' and I still have only a half a chance of being the one who gets the solo room. So... I think I'm going to save myself the trouble and go get to know Parvati."

Tara pouted as she watched the other girl go. "Hmmp. Well that wasn't as much fun as I was hoping. It's no fun knowing how to cheat if there's nobody to screw out of things." Tossing the galleon back into her open trunk, she closed the lid and slowly lifted it into the air with a swish and a flick. Then she strode forward, entering the center room and her home for the next ten months.

It was certainly... interesting. Her room at Malfoy Manor was southern facing, allowing her to look out over the expansive gardens and filling her room with light. Her dorm, on the other hand, looked out into the lake. Four globes of roiling emerald fire filled the room with an eerie, pulsating green light that cast odd highlights over the silver hangings of the four poster bed she'd be sleeping in.

Well, no amount of pondering how much nicer and more welcoming the other dorms might be would change the fact that she had been sorted into Slytherin. Squaring her shoulders, Tara floated her trunk to rest at the bed and then flipped the lid up again. She'd prepared for the eventuality that either the furnishings wouldn't be up to her standards or that she'd have spare room to use as she saw fit; her trunk was full of furniture that needed to be enlarged and moved into place, clothes to put away, books to shelve once there was a place to put them...

"Dobby!"

As far as dorms went, Tracey Davis mused, she didn't have it half bad. Definitely better than one of the underwater dorms her father had talked about having back when he was in Slytherin. And given she didn't know anyone in her new house, she definitely wasn't going to complain about Ravenclaw Tower having individual rooms for each student instead of group dorms the way Gryffindor Tower did.

Her first taste of what the next seven years would hold for her had come when she'd been the one to answer the doorknocker's riddle for the group and they'd passed through a tunnel into the common room. Done up in shades of blue, the few walls not possessing bookshelves held windows that looked west out over the mountains, and the domed ceiling bore a beautiful painting of the night sky.

After a quick tour of the features of the common room - the bookcases organized by subject, study areas with special dampening charms to mute what little noise pollution the common room had, and the statue of Rowena Ravenclaw - the group had split in half and Penelope had lead them upstairs to show them to their dorms. There were seven floors, she'd explained, each housing a bathroom and one room per female student. As the girls aged, they would ascend the tower, eventually occupying the topmost floor during their final year. And with that, she'd left them to their own devices and headed up to her own dorm to settle in for the year, leaving the five girls standing awkwardly in the middle of the room. Tracey had been the first to crack, grabbing her trunk and fleeing through the door marked with her last name, the others bursting into motion behind her.

Giving one last look around her room, Tracey rose from the chair in front of the beautiful oak desk the school had provided her with and moved to sit on the edge of her bed. Picking up the mirror sitting atop her nightstand, she fiddled a tendril of mahogany hair before tucking it behind her ear and clearing her throat. "Daphne Greengrass."

Monday dawned bright and early and, still used to five o'clock wake up calls, Harry was up and moving before any of his classmates. Opting not to try and squeeze in either a run in the Room of Requirement or around the grounds on his first day of classes, he spent a bit of time reading before gathering up his toiletries and a clean uniform and heading towards the bathroom. A cold burst to wake him up, a quick warm shower to get clean, and then he was ready to get his day started.

Much to his surprise, there was already someone else sitting in the common room when he arrived. Hermione was sitting on a sofa with a satchel full of books at her feet, keeping herself amused by bouncing an orange ball against the head of a yard long stick. Harry eyed it curiously, wondering how hard Neville's head was by comparison and how it would fair against Hermione's field hockey stick if he was dumb enough to insult her when she had it out.

Or rather when, not if, he did it. Given how stupid the Boy-Who-Lived seemed to be in this universe, Harry regarded it as an inevitable event rather than a potential problem. Hopefully one he

could manage to sell tickets to. George and Fred weren't the only ones who could profit off their peers.

Feeling a bit playful, Harry kept to the shadows and fired off a charm at Hermione, hitting the back of her head and creating Gryffindor red streaks in her chocolate brown mane. As he pondered a way to approach her and bring it up without immediately drawing suspicion to himself, Megan descended from the girls' dorms and squealed. "Oh Hermione, that's brill! Did you get a one of the older students to do that to your hair or do you know the spell yourself?"

Hermione eyed Megan for a moment, reaching up to pat her hair, before racing up the steps into her dorm. Harry knew the exact moment she stepped in front of a mirror, as it was accompanied by the loudest profanity he'd heard since that time two young men had come to the front door of Number Four asking Uncle Vernon to sign a petition in favor of the Civil Partnership Act. When Hermione descended the stairs again, she looked around wildly before her eyes landed on him. "You!"

"Me?" Harry held his hands up in surrender and put on his best innocent face, slowly backing away from her. "Now Hermione, you shouldn't jump to conclusions. Just because I mentioned my father being a prankster while we were talking on the train doesn't mean I'm responsible for your hair spontaneously changing color."

Hermione continued to eye him suspiciously but thankfully Percy chose that moment to make his first appearance of the morning, and Hermione latched on to him in hopes of getting her hair fixed. After a simple 'finite' failed, he tried a few diagnostic charms and frowned. "It's definitely a cosmetic charm of some kind, but this isn't my area of expertise. It looks like you'll need to find one of the older female prefects, since Cherise is... unavoidably detained... this morning."

That caught Harry's attention; while he hadn't been at his most observant back in his first year, he was pretty sure he would have remembered a prefect turning up sick or injured on the first day of classes. "What happened to her?"

After a moment of contemplation, Percy sighed and leaned in towards Harry and Hermione. "Please keep this to yourselves, but Cherise decided that Dumbledore's warning about the third floor corridor didn't apply to her because she was a prefect and paid a

visit during her rounds last night. She's currently recovering in the hospital wing."

Well bugger. Cherise had been nice enough to him so far and very easy on the eyes to boot. A girl like that getting mauled by Fluffy was a damn shame. They likely wouldn't be seeing her for a while, even with Madam Pomfrey's talents, and for all the wizarding world's ability to heal the body's insides, their ability to remove anything beyond minor scars seemed to be sorely lacking. And if Fluffy had gotten a few bites in, Cherise was going to come away from this bearing a resemblance to Remus. "Alright. Thanks, Percy. Ready for breakfast, Hermione? We can get our schedules for the year and see what classes we have today. Which reminds me, do you really want to drag all your books down there when you don't know which ones you'll even need?"

"Eh, I need to stay in shape. It'll be good for me." Hermione hefted her bag experimentally a few times before sliding the strap over her shoulder. "And I would, but I told Su and Daphne that we'd wait for them. Or that I'd wait for them, which means you're waiting for them if you want to eat breakfast with me. Although if they don't show up in the next few minutes, I might change my mind. I want to make friends and all, but nobody gets between me and my breakfast. Or my dinner. I'll tolerate lunch delays, but only if it's because of studying or sports."

Merlin, this Hermione was scary. Almost like what Harry would picture from a child of the Ron and Hermione of his old dimension, just without the freckles. Seeing as how he wanted Su to be part of his inner circle in this universe - and hopefully Daphne as well - it was quite fortunate for him that they descended the stairs about a minute later, before Hermione could get too impatient and drag him off to eat.

"Nice hair, Hermione." Reaching up, Su tugged one of the red streaks and then laughed, dancing back out of the way as Hermione tried to slap at her hand. "You know, I liked that picture of you with the 'microbraids' that you showed us last night. Maybe we could braid the red streaks and put gold beads on the end? McGonagall might give you points for house pride."

Harry pondered that. Their head of house had an odd sense of humor. Maybe he should turn his own hair into red and gold spikes

to see what she'd say? Mind busy trying to decide between fixing Hermione and changing his own hair, Harry didn't notice Daphne's approach until she elbowed him roughly in the ribs. "Don't even think about it, Harry." He raised an eyebrow and she tugged gently on his arm. "Whatever strange thoughts are going on inside your head. That is not the face of an innocent man. Now be a gentleman and escort me to breakfast. And can we try and save a spot for Tracey? She's mirror called me for the last two nights because she's lonely. I want to make sure she's okay."

Fine with him. Hmm. If he paid extra attention to her to help her get over her loneliness, she'd probably be more likely to... wait. The Sorting Hat had warned him about the habits he'd been developing as of late. So no, he would make a point of trying to include Tracey and keep her spirits up because she was Daphne's half-sister and an acquaintance - verging on a friend - in her own right. Any possible use she might have in his future plans would just be a bonus. "Sure. Why don't we take up six seats between the four of us? Two of us sit on each side of the table with a gap between each pair? You can invite Tracey and I'll see if my cousin wants to sit with us."

"Your cousin? I'm hoping you're not saying what I think you are, so... there aren't any cadet branches of the House of Potter, meaning it's not a first cousin on your father's side. Your mother is a muggleborn, so nothing there..." Daphne trailed off as Harry lead her through the portrait hole and they began their descent towards the Great Hall, Su and Hermione chattering quietly behind them. "Seriously, you're not going to try and get Altaira to join us, are you?"

Harry looked at the strawberry blonde curiously, Daphne managing to hold his gaze for a few seconds before looking away. "And if I do? We're not quite best friends, but we're close enough that I'd enjoy talking to her at breakfast every now and then. Why not do it while you're inviting your sister over too? Having a Ravenclaw there too might keep people from freaking out about the Slytherin. Or at least freaking out as much."

Shrugging doubtfully, Daphne continued to avoid his gaze. "Fine. But if she ends up being mean to Tracey and I have to curse her to defend my family's honor or some such, don't say I didn't warn you." Turning her head, she eyed Harry critically. "You know, you're lucky

my choices are so limited." Harry ached a brow at that. "Neville is vile and the other boys aren't anything to write home about either. Anne is... you know, I don't know if your family is friends with the Weasleys or anything so I'm going to just say 'no' and leave it at that. I know something about muggles through Tracey and my stepmother but Megan seems to want to basically be a muggle with a wand; she doesn't seem to care that there's an entire society here, she just wants to learn some spells and then go home. Not someone I'm interested in being friends with. At least Hermione is interested in learning about my world, even if she's a bit snooty sometimes about us 'backwards wizarding folk'. And Su's interesting because she was raised in an entirely different culture. And if I take Su and Hermione I get you, or at least that's what it feels like. Which is fine by me; I'm a long view sort of girl. When we get older, we'll need a nice young wizard to defend our honor. And with you, we get a nice young wizard who can cook too. How can we lose?"

Not knowing Megan enough to defend her - nor did he actually know the Weasleys here, so there was nothing to say on that front - Harry settled for nodding slowly before smirking at Daphne. "You sure you don't belong down in the dungeons with my cousin?"

"No thank you. Dank stone does nothing for my complexion." Daphne just grinned before slipping his arm through his. "And besides, you'll be the envy of boys in a few years. Three pretty girls for friends, and girls will be fighting for a chance to go out with someone with something close to proper manners."

Well, Hermione probably wouldn't... but Harry decided to keep that thought to himself.

Entering the Great Hall and grabbing the last few seats at the Gryffindor table, the quartet settled in two to a side with Harry and Hermione serving as the buffer between their group and the rest of the table. After a moment's contemplation, Daphne took the seat on Hermione's side of the table while leaving the seat between them for Tracey and Su took up the seat to Harry's left at the end of the table, leaving a spot for Tara.

Place settings flashed into existence nearby as the hall's magic registered their presence, followed shortly by platters full of breakfast essentials, and Harry graciously allowed the girls to have first dibs before loading up his own plate and starting in on the most

important meal of the day. An egg, some beans, and half a tomato later - Harry couldn't bring himself to touch the streaky rashers; he really had become spoiled while doing the shopping - breakfast was brought to an abrupt halt as an owl dive bombed the table, slamming into the bowl of fruit between Harry and Hermione and sending apples rolling down the table. While not quite Errol of the Weasleys - he'd yet to fly into a window or anything - he was getting on in years and was still kept quite busy. Lifting the poor owl free, Harry took the letter he carried before offering a piece of bacon. "Thanks, boy. Why don't you go find Albiona up in the owlery and rest for the day? I'll write something today and you can take it back home to mum tomorrow."

Silver Star hooted in relief and winged away, leaving Harry to return to his breakfast... and his first letter from home. Absently digging back into his scrambled eggs, Harry used his other hand to unroll the parchment so he could see what his mother - presumably; he couldn't see his father taking the time to sit down and write him anything - had to say.

Dear Harry,

By now you've been sorted and - since the school hasn't flooded to tell us about a major fight in the dungeons - I'm going to go out on a limb and say you haven't been sorted into Slytherin. Ravenclaw? Gryffindor? You'll do fine in either, although if you end up in Ravenclaw, promise me you won't use your knowledge to get too far ahead. Your poor classmates will have breakdowns trying to show you up and that would just be mean of you.

Sirius said to remember that you're the son of a Marauder and pull as many pranks as you can, starting as soon as possible. Anastasiya said he's going to be sleeping on their sofa for the next week. Keep that in mind before you try something. I want to hear nothing but good things about you from your teachers. Especially given your advantage.

You know, I kept meaning to ask you why you were even bothering with Hogwarts, given your memories, but the time never seemed right. For some reason, though, I doubt you're there to cheat your way to the top of the class in Charms. Just promise me that you'll try not to get hurt doing whatever it is you're there to do.

Enough of that, at least for now. Good luck with your first day of classes. And for the love of God, Merlin, and anyone else listening...

watch yourself around Severus Snape. Dumbledore may trust him to teach you children, but I've known him since before I went to Hogwarts. He is a vile, hateful man and you should be on your guard around him at all times.

Love,
Your Mother

PS: If you absolutely feel the need to prank someone, prank Snape.

PPS: I didn't say that and you can't prove otherwise.

Harry was frowning as he finished reading the letter, but let out a quiet snort of laughter as the last two lines disappeared from the page. Not that he hadn't been planning to stay on his guard against Snape anyways... but to have his own mother warn him was disturbing. He'd been aware of the past between them in his old universe. Was it the same here? Was this how his mother had felt by the end of her time at Hogwarts? Or had something happened after to fan the flames of dislike into genuine hatred?

Albiona disrupted his thoughts as she swooped down, grabbing a piece of bacon before disappearing back up into the rafters. Harry blinked and shook his head. Cheeky owl. Percy bustled past, dropping four schedules in the middle of the table near them. It took Hermione, Harry, Su, and Daphne a few moments to sort out whose schedule belonged to who... at which point they all laughed, realizing that at this point, they all shared the same schedule. Harry looked it over; pretty much the same as he remembered. Thrice-weekly Herbology classes with Professor Sprout, History of Magic on Mondays and Wednesdays, Astronomy late on Wednesdays, Transfiguration, Charms, and DADA on Tuesdays and Thursdays, and double Potions with the afternoon off on Fridays.

A flash of blonde in the corner of his eye drew Harry's attention over to the entrance to the Great Hall, where Tara was arriving for breakfast with the other Slytherin girls from her year. Whistling to get her attention, he beckoned her over and then gestured to the seat between him and Su. "The food isn't as good as when I cook, but want to join us anyways?"

Tara raised an eyebrow at that but took him up on his offer, sliding into the seat beside him. "You do know Hogwarts employs the largest staff of house elves in England, right?" Harry nodded. "And you think you can do better? You really do take after your father, don't you?" Narrowing his eyes, Harry scooped some scrambled eggs off his plate and shoved them into her mouth. Tara glared back at him as she chewed slowly before making a face and swallowing. "...I'm not going to say it. You don't need any bigger of an ego."

"Aww. You know I'm your favorite second cousin once removed, Tara."

"Only because Crabbe is a gorilla, Dora's a freak, and Aunt Anastasiya has made Cassie so neurotic that she's impossible to get past polite conversation with. And you make those delicious splits."

"Hmmp." The others were sniggering at the byplay and Harry decided to cut his loses before Tara managed to convince the rest of his friends it was Pick On Harry Day. Looking around the hall, he realized that Daphne had missed her sister's entrance and pulled out a piece of parchment and a quill, scribbling down a quick note before using a spell to fold it into an airplane and send it shooting across to the Ravenclaw table. Instead of landing neatly in front of her, though, it lodged in one of Tracey's pigtails just past the hair tie and Harry cringed. "Oops."

Joe's Note: More cleanup in this chapter. No threatening to kill people over a Remembrall... cuz yeah, that won't get you weird looks at all. Yes, Harry is implying that he killed Snape via poisoning in his old world. And yes, the reference to the Carrow sisters is a nod to Flora and Hestia from Holly, Phoenix, Diamond, Elm.

Finally, in response to several users too cowardly to actually sign in and review - or leave an email with their anonymous review - I have two things to say. First of all, when you call Hermione 'butch', you are not using the word correctly. You're being ignorant. An actual butch lesbian dresses like and/or tries to pass as a boy. Hermione does not. She does wear pants on occasion, yes, but I'm sure most of the girls on here own a pair or two of those and it doesn't make them butch lesbians, now does it? But even if I was doing that with Hermione? I'd be okay with it. Do you know why? Because they actually exist. It's where the stereotype came from in the first place: people like that actually do exist out there in the real world. Secondly, I use the term LGBT in my notes for a reason. Lily and Narcissa are not lesbian. They are bisexual. Or what, are you under the impression that they spent several years slipping and falling on their respective husband's crotches? Leading to three conceptions and four children between the pair? Seriously? Grow up a bit, people. If you can accept that the Hermione in your Harry Stu harem fanfic is bisexual enough to enjoy getting it on with Ginny or Luna or Susan Bones, why does the idea of an adult woman interested in both genders blow your mind so badly?

The first week of classes was fun, reminding Harry of the simple joy of magic back in his first year at Hogwarts. Mostly because... well, it was his first year. Again. As best he could tell - he hadn't wandered off in search of the third year and above elective teachers - all the same professors were here and acted the same. Well, Flitwick hadn't fallen off his stack of books in excitement the first time he called 'Harry Potter' in Charms... but he had done it a few seconds before for 'Neville Longbottom', which was close enough in Harry's book.

He'd been looking forward to a chance to finally one-up Hermione - which wasn't really fair, considering he had seven years of very advanced training on her - but found himself denied both in that class and Transfiguration, where she and Su had quickly paired off. Dean and Megan had done likewise, drawn together as friends by their shared muggle upbringing. That left him with Daphne, Anne,

Neville, or the Boy-Who-Lived's lapdog, who also answered to the name Larry. Like Neville or Larry, the answer was a no brainer.

This time with a friend of equivalent intellect by her side, Hermione raced through the first lesson even more quickly than the first time, she and Su egging each other on in a competition to be the first with a properly transfigured matchstick. Under other circumstances, they would have come in first and second, earning Gryffindor ten points a piece for their work. Unfortunately for the two girls, they were competing against someone who had mastered the lesson seven years ago. With a haphazard flick of his wand, Harry turned his matchstick into a needle, earning him ten points and a comment about his father's prowess in the discipline.

Daphne was the only member of their little group to struggle with the assignment and after watching her fail for the fifth time, Harry reached out and put his hand over hers. After seeing her blast Neville the night before, he knew she had power and control to manage something this simple. Even if she was unfamiliar with the spell in question - and he doubted whoever had tutored her before Hogwarts had skipped over transfiguration basics entirely - it still should have been no problem for her... assuming she was approaching it the right way. Rather than lecture her, though, the way Hermione was prone to when she knew something that someone else didn't, Harry asked her a simple question. "How did you manage a stunner so easily last night, Daphne?"

"Easy, I just focused on the idea of stunning Lardbottom for that look he gave me, harnessed the power, and funneled it through my wand to keep it from being wild magic. Come on, Harry, you're from a magical household. You should know something that sim..." Daphne abruptly trailed off and looked from Harry to the matchstick and back. Harry just smirked and raised an eyebrow. Turning her attention to her matchstick, Daphne waved her wand and said the incantation on the board, the slim shaft of wood warping and shifting into a perfect sewing needle. "Well I'll be. Thanks, Harry."

As much as he tried to be surprised, Harry couldn't even manage to fake it when neither Larry nor Neville managed to finish the assignment by the end of class. Each received a hefty homework assignment for their trouble, one he'd done himself the first time around. Heh. That'd keep them down in the library and away from

him for a while. Victory was his... even though he really hadn't done anything.

In Charms, Su and Hermione again paired off to compete against each other, leaving Daphne and Harry together. Neither minded too terribly much, though, and after Harry once again stymied the dynamic duo's quest to be the first to perform the class's assignment - in this case, levitating a feather - he started tickling Daphne with his flying feather. Faster than she'd managed in Transfiguration, Daphne mastered the spell and almost poked his eye out as she whipped her feather shaft-first at him, a rather familiar smirk on her face as she let it drift away before dive-bombing him again.

Batting at the feather until he managed to pin it to the desk, Harry waited for Daphne to release her spell before relaxing and leaning in, nodding towards where Su and Hermione appeared to be having a dueling banjos moment going, the muggleborn repeatedly trying to outdo her Asian companion, only to have Su perfectly mimic her feather's movements each time. Somehow, her hair had survived a visit to the sixth and seventh year female prefects and she'd taken Su's advice that day, braiding the red sections and ending each with a gold bead. He found it rather fetching on her, or at least as fetching as he could find an eleven-year-old girl without feeling like a pedophile. "So, how long do you think it'll be before she goes to a professor to get her hair fixed?"

"Not sure. The question is, do you want to let it last that long?" Daphne's eyes flicked from Harry to Hermione and back. "If she does go to a professor, she might ask them to do more than fix it. Maybe, I don't know, see if they can figure out whose magic it is on her in the first place? And she may be new to magic, but she's a mean one. She'd probably start learning some nasty little spells just to get her revenge." Hmm. She had a point there. "You should have heard her swearing while she fussed with her hair this morning. Some of the things that come out of that girl's mouth... I've never heard such creative yet disturbing examples of profanity in my life. She's even worse than my father was that time he found out my mother had spent a quarter of the family's budgeted galleons for the year on new shoes."

Hmm. If this version of Daphne's family was equally as rich as the version from his universe... that was a whole lot of shoes. Harry

looked down at his feet. He only had two of them: one left and one right. What did someone need that many shoes for?

Given that he'd never liked his fame, Harry had found the following day particularly amusing. So many others, Ron among them, had wanted to be him in his old world and so it was fun to step back and watch as someone else experienced what he lived with... even if it was just an evil dungeon-dwelling bat.

"Ah yes. Neville Longbottom. Our new... celebrity." Snape went through roll call before his dark eyes rose from the parchment, sweeping back over the class slowly. "You are here to learn the subtle science and exact art of potion making. As there is little foolish wand-waving here, many of you will hardly believe this is magic. I don't expect you will really understand the beauty of the softly simmering cauldron with its shimmering fumes, the delicate power of liquids that creep through human veins, bewitching the mind, ensnaring the senses... I can teach you how to bottle fame, brew glory, and even stopper death... if you aren't as big a bunch of dunderheads as I usually have to teach."

There were snickers from the Slytherins, although Harry couldn't call either side of the room the 'Slytherin side'. Tara had decided to take Su's advice and pair with Harry, on the condition that the decently capable Su pair with the dismal Pansy to ensure her housemate didn't do too badly. That left Hermione and Daphne together, the rest of the Gryffindors and Slytherins scattered around the clump of interhouse cooperation in the middle of the room. Snape sneered as he looked back and forth between his goddaughter and the son of his school nemesis before whirling and turning his attention to... "Longbottom! What would I get if I added powdered root of asphodel to an infusion of wormwood?"

"I don't know, sir."

Sneer firmly in place, Snape clucked his tongue. "Tut tut, Longbottom. Fame clearly isn't everything. Let's try again, shall we? Longbottom, where would you look if I told you to find me a bezoar?"

Neville, looking as clueless as usual, gave a helpless shrug. "I don't know, sir."

"Decided not to open a book before coming to my class, eh, Longbottom?" Harry smirked; he, Hermione, Su, and Daphne had taken over a corner of the common room the night before with their copies of One Thousand Magical Herbs and Fungi and Magical Drafts and Potions. Oddly enough, Hermione had barely touched either before that point, not finding herbology or potions to be particularly fascinating subjects, but all four were now passably informed in case Snape turned his attention their way. "What is the difference, Longbottom, between monkshood and wolfsbane?"

Neville sighed. "I don't know." Then the unfairness of his situation finally seemed to occur to him, and he glared at Snape. "Why are you picking on me? I bet nobody else in here could answer those questions either!"

After pondering his request for a moment, Snape grinned evilly at Longbottom. "Five points from Gryffindor for your insubordination, Longbottom, but... very well. Let's see if one of your housemates can lose you even more points. Potter!" Harry just looked up lazily from the notes he'd been jotting; he'd been expecting Snape to demand information be written down after he revealed the answers and had decided to get a head start. "Asphodel and wormwood. What happens when I combine them?"

Harry just smirked back at the potion master. Well, he had gotten permission from Lily, after all. He had the mother of all pranks in mind... he just had to get Snape in there too. "I'm going to go out on a limb and say... some sort of potion. Right?"

"Amusing. Asphodel and wormwood make a sleeping potion so powerful it is known as the Draught of Living Death, Potter." Drawing closer, Snape loomed over Harry and Tara, staring down with malicious black eyes. "Perhaps you can tell me where a bezoar comes from, then, since you lack knowledge of basic potions?"

Pondering that for a moment, Harry shrugged and just kept smirking. "An apothecary?"

Titters of laughter greeted his flippant answer, at least until Snape looked up and his glare cowed the class. "Technically correct... once they have been harvested from the stomach of a goat. They can save you from most poisons, which is what makes them relevant in my domain. Neither potions nor the requisite equipment

seems to be your forte... perhaps ingredients? Monkshood and wolfsbane. What's the difference, Potter?"

"Oh, I know this one. They're the same. It's also called aconite. I hear it's a great way to add a little flavor to your tea when you're expecting a potion master over." Harry narrowed his eyes as he met Snape's gaze, hoping the man would lash out mentally if provoked verbally. "Particularly *Aconitum ferox*." Oh yes, he would love to give this man another dose of *Aconitum ferox* if he could manage to get away with it. Nothing beat a nice mug of elf-made hot cocoa, some biscuits, and watching your childhood tormentor vomit and then asphyxiate as his respiratory system failed...

The glare that Snape gave him made it very clear to Harry that his gibe had not escaped the older man's notice; he was most certainly aware that Harry wasn't suggesting a medicinal use for aconite. The professor's eyes drifted down to Harry's book before widening as he took in the scribbles filling the margins, written in a looping script far too feminine to be his. "Mister Potter... would you care to tell me why your book has been defaced before your first class period?"

Harry looked down at his book and then smiled as his gaze met Snape's. "They're my mum's. We had enough money for new ones, but I decided to bring hers with me instead. Now that I think about it, the whole thing makes me feel a bit like royalty. Knowledge is power and I'm inheriting power from my parents... it's almost like being a Prince, wouldn't you say?" Harry gave the professor a cheeky little wink and that was enough to set the man off, sending Snape crashing into his occlumency shields with the subtlety of a wounded dragon. His grin widened. Gotcha.

Mentally begging forgiveness from all the deities he could think of, Harry began to work quickly, pulling memories together to craft a fake image in his mind. The core was one of his wilder sexual escapades with Luna; in particular, a ménage à trois where the Daphne of his world had joined them for one night. It had come after a particularly rough battle and more drinking than was probably advisable, but thankfully they'd been able to laugh it off in the morning and remain friends without things being too awkward... although he was pretty sure he'd caught Luna staring at Daphne's chest once or twice when she thought nobody was looking. Carefully selecting a portion where he was taking Luna from behind as the blonde buried her head between Daphne's legs and the Slytherin

leaned her head back as she moaned loudly - which meant less work for him since there were no faces to change - Harry got to work altering the necessary visible details. A few times that summer Lily had bundled the family into the van and taken them the fifteen minutes south to the local beach, making it quite easy for Harry to twist Luna into Lily in his mind, substituting in his mother's hair color, current length and style, and adding the few birthmarks he'd seen when his mother wore a swimsuit to Luna's flawless skin. Daphne took a bit longer to work over and was based more on assumption than fact, but soon enough Harry had her looking like Narcissa... or hopefully close enough to Narcissa to trick Snape.

Somewhere between amused and utterly disturbed and repulsed by what he'd done, Harry pushed the image forward into a buffer zone and then let his shields flutter as Snape probed a nearby section. Taking the bait, Snape slammed all his strength into probing the 'weakened' area and after a moment, Harry let the outer layer of shielding fall to expose the fabricated memory. After a moment of hesitation, possibly suspecting a trap, Snape latched on... and then abruptly turned almost as green as his house's colors in the real world as he was treated to the incestuous - plus one - tableau. The connection broke abruptly as Snape stumbled back, wrenching his head to the side. "Forty points from Gryffindor. The potion is on the board. Get to work." Protests broke out from both sides, the Slytherins unhappy with the lack of actual instruction and the Gryffindors complaining about both that and the point removal. "Now! Or I'll have you all serving a week's detentions with Filch!"

Harry chuckled. Victory was his! Again! And he'd actually done something this time!

"It's been three days and he still won't stop glaring at you. Do I want to know what you did to my godfather back on the first day of Potions, Harry?"

"I don't know... you saw what it did to him. Do you want to know?" After thinking about that for a few, Tara shook her head and Harry chuckled before gesturing to the seat beside him. "Didn't think so. Anyways, what can I do for you? I know I said you can join my friends and I whenever you want but if you do it too much, Snape and the other Slytherins might start causing problems for you."

Tara just waved her hand dismissively, circling around the library table and taking the seat beside Harry. "And my mother knows most of their mothers and so if they really are stupid enough to pick on a girl, I'm sure they'll end up with a nasty letter from home about it." There were two muffled thuds and then Harry looked down as something came to rest on his lap. A foot. Harry looked from it to Tara's face, raising an eyebrow, and she scoffed at him before nudging his thigh with her other foot. "Well, go on then."

As her other green and silver striped foot came to rest on his lap, Harry set down his quill. "You know, I never should have let you listen in when I talked to your mother about how much Luna loved my foot massages. Besides, you have it easy compared to the rest of us. If anyone has a right to complain about hurting feet, it's Hermione, Su, Daphne, or Tracey. Or me. We're the ones with dorms on the seventh floor."

"You do remember I'm a Malfoy, right? I don't walk places, I send Dobby there to get things for me. Any walking is too much walking in my book. I've been walking. So now my feet hurt. Rub them." Tara's spoiled words made Harry roll his eyes but he reached down and began rubbing the sole of her foot. Mostly because he knew arguing was futile and the sooner she was satisfied, the sooner she'd leave him alone. Homework naturally came easily to him but it was still time consuming and the sooner he got his work finished, the more free time he'd have left that weekend. "Ahh. Much better."

As he slowly moved down from the ball of her foot to the arch, Harry shook his head. "If you think this is bad, wait until we start Astronomy. All the way up to the top of the one tower at Hogwarts that's taller than the one my dorm is in." Tara let out a groan; whether it was due to that or what he was doing to her feet, Harry wasn't sure, but he decided to keep up the teasing. "And since I don't see you taking Muggle Studies, look at your choices for third year electives. Care of Magical Creatures... out on the grounds. Divination? North Tower. Ancient Runes is up on the sixth floor and the classroom for Arithmancy isn't too far from Gryffindor Tower's portrait. No matter what, you're doing some hiking."

Tara pouted as she pondered the problem. "Hmm. I wonder if I can get away signing up for your classes and just using you to bring my homework to me and deliver it the next class? Probably not, even if I am a Malfoy. Hmm. Well, I see only one solution to this problem."

Leaning forward, she squeezed one of Harry's biceps. "I'll get you trained up by third year and then I can ride from class to class on your back."

"...I am not giving you piggyback rides around Hogwarts, Tara. Especially when you're thirteen."

"Aww. And here I thought I was your favorite second cousin once removed?"

"No, that's Dora. And if you try to turn me into your steed, Cassie might pass you too."

Four tables away, Hermione let her book drop back onto the table as she gave up on any pretense of studying and looked from Harry and Tara to her friends and back. "Am I the only one freaked out by the two of them? They're eleven. And they're cousins. I'm not sure which part of that is worse. Hmm. No, the more I think about it, the equally gross both parts seem."

Daphne spared a quick glance up from her essay for Professor Flitwick before shrugging and returning to her writing. "I don't see the problem. Or what age has to do with anything, Miss 'Chicks Dig Scars'." Hermione narrowed her eyes at Daphne for that one. She'd told her new friends about her preferences because she'd wanted to get the freaking out and ditching done with now, rather than a few years down the road after she'd become emotionally invested in the three. Surprisingly, all three had been accepting enough and Su had even joked that she'd keep an eye on Hermione to make sure she didn't make a fool of herself around their peers once she matured to the point that she actually started looking for a girlfriend. "Harry's mature for his age, we all know that. It's odd. That doesn't change that he's mature. We like it, remember? It's why we spend time with him? So if he did become the first boy in our year to get a girlfriend, it really wouldn't surprise me. Now, not that I think there's anything going on between them, but even if there was? It's not like their parents are siblings, Hermione. They're second cousins once removed; you have to go all the way back to Cygnus Black to find where their trees meet. And don't even look at me like that, you know I know these things."

"Whatever. If you can name how close someone is on your family tree, they're too close, Daphne. And I'm sticking to that." Hermione

stared at the quietly talking pair for a long moment before looking away. She knew it wasn't jealousy; even at her age she had a defined enough set of aesthetic preferences and blondes weren't part of them. Nor were boys, which eliminated both halves of the pair. So why did they bother her. Maybe Daphne was the weird one and Su or Tracey would vindicate her? "Tracey? Su? Help me out here?"

Peering up from a Potions essay, Tracey shook her head rapidly. "Leave me out of this. Besides, what makes you think I know anything about normal families or relationships?" Touché.

Su wasn't any more helpful. "You're really making something out of nothing, Hermione. Like Daphne said, if there was something going on - and I'm with her, I think they're just close because he's known her longer than anyone here at Hogwarts - it wouldn't be that weird. There are a lot fewer wizards and witches than muggles. Of course family trees overlap more than muggles' do."

"Thanks, Su."

"Welcome. And it could be worse. At least they're not as weird as that Carrow boy's sisters. They walk around holding hands."

All three girls let out squeals of disgust... and were promptly shushed by Madam Pince.

His second week of school brought something Harry had been dreading: flying lessons. Not that he was afraid of flying, far from it. But evidently this Neville Longbottom had more in common with Harry's prior self than just the scar: he too wanted to be seeker for the Gryffindor team, although he saw it and the bending of the 'no brooms for first years' rule to be his right as the Boy-Who-Lived rather than a privilege. Arrogant brat.

It left Harry with a bit of a dilemma, though. What did he do if the Remembrall situation - or something close enough - came up again? Did he let Longbottom take care of it, securing the boy a position on the Gryffindor team? Well, assuming he actually had any skill, which Harry doubted. If he did let Longbottom go and he failed, not only would the Boy-Who-Lived not be on the team but then neither would he, at least until second year. But if he did allow the events of his old universe to replay themselves completely, he'd end up standing out

even more and breed further resentment from Longbottom's corner in the process.

Choices choices.

Su and Daphne were both old hands on brooms by this point, having come from pureblood families, while Hermione was again a bit nervous. At least she wasn't terrified of heights or flying in this universe. As best Harry could tell she was just nervous she'd be horrible at flying, and that was primarily because she wanted to play quidditch later in her Hogwarts career. Hopefully she'd be at least a passable flier, though; even if it turned out she was unsuitable for quidditch, it would be nice to have her able to join him on the pitch in her spare time instead of nagging him about revising the way her old self had.

After lunch that day, the Gryffindors and Slytherins made their way out onto the grounds for their first - and only, Harry mused, unless the others had been given further classes he'd been exempt from - flying lesson. As disgruntled as the girls had seemed before with the girls' charmed skirts, Daphne and Anne certainly seemed jealous of the trousers Hermione and Megan were sporting for the lesson. There were two rows of ten brooms lying on the grass when they arrived and without a thought, the two houses moved to stand facing each other with the brooms in between. Again, Harry found himself standing next to Hermione to form the buffer zone between the sexes on the Gryffindor side, with Blaise and Tara doing the same for their house.

There were actually only nine Gryffindors on the field for the first few minutes, the tenth only appearing as he stumbled along at the heels of the arriving Madam Hooch. "For the last time, Longbottom, I have nothing to do with the house's quidditch teams. I am merely the referee for the school's matches. If you are willing to attend try-outs on a school broom and are selected by Mister Wood, then perhaps you'll be allowed to have a broom sent from home but that's not my decision." Huffing, she stopped at one end of the brooms, forcing Neville to run all the way down to the other to take up a spot next to Larry. Her yellow, hawk-like eyes raked back and forth over them before she snorted. "Well, what are you waiting for? Everyone stand by a broomstick. Come on, hurry up."

"You're going to need your dominant hand for this, so right-handed flyers to the left of the broom and vice versa. Everyone got it?" There was a chorus of vaguely affirmative replies and Hooch gave a sharp nod. "Now hold your hand out over the broom and say 'Up!'."

"Up!"

A few brooms rolled over and twitched. Neville got a rude shock as his flew up to hit him in the face before dropping to the grass again, making him stumble back and fall on his ass. All of the Slytherin boys and most of the girls got theirs off the ground on the first try, Tara included, while Bulstrode's broom appeared to be trying to burrow underground to get away from her. Harry reflexively closed his fingers around the shaft of his broom as it jumped to his hand, letting out a sigh of relief as his friends managed it just as easily.

Mounting their brooms, the students waited while Hooch patrolled up and down the two rows, checking their grips and where they were positioned on the broom. "Now, when I blow my whistle, you kick off from the ground. Decently hard, mind you, the charms on the broom take a second or two to kick in and if you don't get high enough you'll be smacking your shins into the ground instead of flying. Once you are in the air, keep your broom steady until you're confident. Lean back and rise a few feet, then lean forward and point the nose down to descend again to the ground. Slowly. On my whistle... three... two... one..."

Harry kicked off, easily leveling off into a hover and looking over at Hermione and the girls. Su and Daphne followed suit and then came the moment of truth: Hermione. He was worried over nothing, though; his muggleborn friend made the transition from ground to air as smoothly as Su and Daphne. "Huh. That's it? This... this is too easy." Hermione grinned and rose a few feet before tipping to one side, rolling her broom a full three hundred and sixty degrees before straightening up. Leaning forward, she descended until her feet touched the ground again and looked around. "Now what?"

Before Madam Hooch could issue new instructions to the class, shouting broke out from the boys' end of the line, coming from both sides. Harry sighed as he watched Neville and Mimas Carrow shout at each other at ever-increasing volumes, eventually culminating with the hovering Carrow rocketing forward and knocking Longbottom off his broom. Even though they weren't too far off the

ground, Longbottom must have landed just wrong because there was a sickening crack that heralded at least one broken bone.

Déjà vu...

"Longbottom! Carrow! Ten points each from Gryffindor and Slytherin for your inane posturing and another five from Slytherin, Carrow, for your attack on Longbottom." Hooch stomped over to where Longbottom was curled in a whimpering ball on the grass. Leaning down, she pulled his arm away from his chest and waved her wand over it. "As I suspected. Broken wrist." Standing again, she glared at the rest of the class. "I need to bring Longbottom to the hospital wing. If I see any of you in the air, you will regret it. Especially you, Carrow."

Everyone in the class nodded their assent but, true to form, as soon as Hooch and Longbottom were out of sight, Carrow dashed forward to scoop up a certain familiar Remembrall and began playing with it. Evidently Longbottom had problems remembering the lessons he'd gotten early thanks to his Ministry blah blah blah. Hmm. Longbottom was out of the way and Carrow seemed intent on giving him the same chance all over again. Coincidence or providence? Did he risk things might turn out differently here or did he go for it? Harry debated with himself for a moment but in the end, he couldn't resist the urge. "Hand over the Remembrall, Carrow."

Looking him up and down, Carrow thought about it for a moment before sneering and shaking his head. "No, I don't think I will, Potter. Maybe I'll leave it up a tree for him to find. See if the fat braggart can actually manage to get up there and fetch it or if he's completely worthless on a broom."

Carrow lifted off the ground again, Remembrall in hand, and Harry waved off the protests of his friends as he mounted his broom and gave pursuit. As Carrow leveled off, evidently not trusting the rickety school broom to take him much higher, Harry zoomed around behind him and started circling the dark-haired boy. "Just you, me, and the sky, Carrow. You sure you want to do this?" Carrow eyed him uncertainly and Harry lifted his hands from his broomstick as he continued to circle, shrugging off his flapping robes and let them flutter to the ground beneath them. "Falling those few feet broke Neville's wrist. What do you think might happen if I ram you off your broom from this high up? Now give... it... up..."

"Fine. You think you're so great, Potter?" Sneering, Carrow drew his arm back and hurled the glowing red Remembrall towards the school, where the upward sloping ground would ensure he'd run out of time to catch it faster. Harry hadn't thought Carrow that clever. Or maybe he wasn't and Harry was just giving him too much credit. Either way, there was a ball that needed catching and he was just the man for the job.

Wheeling around, Harry dove after the ball, pushing the battered school broom to top speed as he pursued his target. He knew he couldn't catch it too early, though; it had to be spectacular, now that he'd committed to this course of action. If it wasn't, he'd just earn punishment for defying Madam Hooch's instructions and not the seeker position. Finally, two feet above the ground, he wrapped his fingers around the Remembrall and pulled up. His toes brushed gently over the grass, leaving two ruffled paths behind him as he came to a complete stop.

Wait for it.

Wait for it...

"Harry Potter!" Ah, there was an angry Professor McGonagall, right on time. "Never, in all my time at Hogwarts... how dare you... might have broken your neck and how would I have explained that to your parents... not even James pulled something that stupid in his youth..." Composing herself with visible effort, she waited until he dismounted from the broom, taking it from him and shoving it into the approaching Hermione's hands. "Potter. Follow me. Now."

Hermione, Su, Daphne, and even Larry and Longbottom's other followers looked ready to protest until Harry silenced them with a shake of his head. Tossing the Remembrall to Anne, who he'd seen with Longbottom's group lately, Harry obediently followed behind his head of house, having to jog to keep up with her impatient, long-legged strides. He didn't feel the same dread as last time around, though, seeing as he knew exactly how this was going to play out. He did his best to at least look nervous so McGonagall wouldn't get suspicious, skidding to a stop behind her as she came to a halt at the Charms classroom. "Professor Flitwick? Might I borrow Wood for a moment?"

A too mature yet partially immature portion of his brain wanted to comment on how utterly dirty that sounded, but Harry managed to keep his mouth shut. Plastering on a look of confusion, Harry followed along as McGonagall led him and his future captain down the hall and into an empty classroom. Oliver was the first to speak up. "Erm, Professor? What's going on? Charms isn't exactly my strongest subject and this is OWL year..."

McGonagall waved off his protests and then proceeded to make introductions. "Potter, this is Oliver Wood. Wood... I've found you a seeker."

Suddenly, Oliver's scholastic concerns melted away in the face of quidditch talk. "Are you serious, Professor?"

"No, she's Professor McGonagall. Sirius is my godfather."

After a moment of silence, McGonagall sighed and pinched the bridge of her nose. "I had hoped I'd never hear that pathetic joke again after Mister Black graduated. He has a daughter starting here next year too, doesn't he?" Harry nodded and McGonagall gave an outright groan at that. "Wonderful. But yes, Wood, he's a natural. Caught a falling Remembrall on a school broom with only a foot or two to spare. I doubt Charlie Weasley could have pulled off a move like that."

Oliver looked ecstatic, walking in a slow circle around Harry. "He's just the right build for a seeker, too. Light... speedy... Potter, you have a decent broom at home you can send for, right?" Harry nodded but looked over at his head of house, raising an eyebrow. "Err, assuming we can get that pesky first year broom ban lifted for him, Professor?"

"I shall speak to Professor Dumbledore and see if we can't bend that first year rule, yes. Heaven knows we need a better team than last year. As good as Weasley was... flattened in that horrible match against Slytherin. I couldn't look Severus in the face for weeks..." McGonagall trailed off before turning and peering sternly over the top of her glasses at Harry. "I want to hear that you're training hard, Potter, or I may punish you for today's incident after all. Understand?"

Harry nodded, then something occurred to him and he bit his lip. It would be pushing his luck... but it was just so bloody brilliant, he couldn't help himself. "Professor? Could you ask about getting the broom rule lifted for Hermione Granger as well?" McGonagall gave him an odd look and Harry turned to Oliver. "Is it true that you took a bludger to the head in your first game and spent a week in the hospital wing?"

"Err, yes?"

Turning back to the professor, Harry continued to unfold his trap. "I bet Gryffindor lost that game, right? I mean, without a keeper, the other team could run up sixteen goals in no time and then let Gryffindor catch the snitch and it wouldn't matter." She nodded slowly. "Now... is there a rule in place that keeps house teams from having reserve players for if someone is sick or injured on the field?" McGonagall shook her head; Harry had already known the answer but had asked anyways just for appearances. "Hermione plays goalkeeper for her field hockey team back in the muggle world; you had to repair her leg when you visited from what she told me. It's a sport where they try to get a fist-sized ball past her into a net. And it's moving a lot faster than a quaffle. Can you think of anyone more perfect to be Gryffindor's reserve keeper for if Wood gets hurt again? And when he graduates, Hermione can take over as keeper so we won't have to go through a new captain and a new keeper at the same time. The team will be used to Hermione already."

McGonagall's jaw dropped for a moment before she composed herself. "That... is startlingly brilliant, Potter. You look so much like your father that sometimes I forget you seem to have inherited your mother's intelligence. Five points to Gryffindor for... something logic-related; I can't think of a good way to phrase it right now." That earned her shocked looks from the two students and she shrugged before offering a small smile that looked odd on their normally stern head of house. "You act as if I'm unaware of Professor Snape's tendencies. If he can take points away for little to no reason, I can award them for the same. Now run along. I'll let you know about Miss Granger's situation as soon as I talk to the headmaster."

While Oliver returned to class and McGonagall left, presumably to talk to Dumbledore, Harry remained in the room and watched from the window as the class continued to learn basic flying technique from Madam Hooch. Hermione really wasn't half bad for someone

who'd never touched a broom before. Certainly not the prodigy he was, but... hell, probably better than Ron. Turning her into a keeper wouldn't be that hard.

Hopefully.

After the bell tolled to indicate the current class period was over, Harry grabbed his bag and made his way out of the abandoned classroom. Heading for the ground floor, he scowled at the sight of Carrow bookended by Crabbe and Goyle as the trio made their way into the Entrance Hall. It was tempting, oh so tempting to hex the little bastard just on general principle. Then again, if Carrow hadn't pulled his stupid stunt, Harry wouldn't be on the quidditch team so he couldn't really complain, now could he? Although he would keep an eye on the boy in the future, since he seemed intent on becoming this universe's version of Draco.

Behind the trio were Su, Daphne, and Hermione. As they spotted their wayward friend, they broke into a run - or in Daphne's case, a fast yet refined walk - towards him, Hermione accidentally bumping against Carrow as she passed. "Oy! Mudblood! Watch where you're going!"

Su and Daphne kept moving but Hermione came to an abrupt stop and Harry let a wide grin stretch over his features, knowing what was about to happen. As much as he should be the mature one in his group of friends, being older by six years... there was something infinitely satisfying about watching immature little pureblood shits get beaten up, especially by a girl. Dropping her book bag with a loud thump, Hermione slowly turned to face the Slytherin. "What did you just say?"

"You heard me, mudblood." Far braver now that he was back on the ground, Carrow made a show out of brushing off the spot where Hermione had brushed against him. "I don't need you getting your filthy mudblood germs on my robes. Who knows what I might catch from you?"

Hermione stomped forward, hands curling into fists. Somehow Harry doubted that Carrow had yet to hear about Hermione's antics on the Hogwarts Express; perhaps he was dismissing the danger because she had inflicted pain on Longbottom the muggle way? He knew from experience, though, that having your bones broken by brute

force was just as painful as by magic. Stopping in front of the arrogant pureblood, Hermione held up her left hand and extended her index finger. "Call me a mudblood... one more time."

Leaning in, Carrow grinned widely. "Mudblo..."

He didn't get to finish.

Hermione extended her middle finger to give Carrow the two-fingered salute before her right hand came up and drove itself into his nose with a sickening crunch. Stumbling back with a cry, Carrow tripped over the hem of his robes and fell flat on his arse, staring up at Hermione in fear. "God. You purebloods are supposed to be sophisticated. Learn some bloody fucking manners." Turning away, she scooped up her bag and marched over to Harry. Pausing in front of him, she crossed her arms over her chest and glared. "What?"

"Has anyone ever told you that you have anger management issues, Hermione?"

"Yes. Now tell us what happened to you when McGonagall took you away before I punch you."

"Just checking." Wrapping an arm around her shoulders, Harry pulled her down the hall as Su and Daphne fell in behind them. "As for our lovely deputy headmistress... let me tell you the tale of a poor little half-blood and his angry head of house..."

Joe's Note: Long note here, but necessary. Firstly, I wasn't quite sure of how to do brooms in this story because... well, I never quite got the naming behind the brooms in canon. They were nine years ahead of the current year in story time and didn't match the publication year or year Rowling wrote each story, either. Maybe we got the Firebolt because Rowling realized how stupid it was? At anyways, we have the Nimbus 2001 in 2001 here, and next year will see the Nimbus 2002. Harry has a Nimbus 2000 at home because he got it the year before. Also, has anyone noticed the strange disconnect of bludgers... enchanted iron balls flying at high speed that can reduce wood to splinters but we see a player get hit in the head and it doesn't explode like an overripe melon? Makes me wonder how much iron is actually in that ball, you know? Finally, when we get to the dream sequence... many of my OCs and INOs - characters like Daphne and Tracey and Su who I fleshed out into real characters myself - are physically patterned on my friends using growth charts of their real height and measurements at certain ages. One of them was even wearing the same size bra as the average British adult woman during her second year of Hogwarts. There are a variety of body types and sizes in life, ranging from large to small and everything in between. Don't like it? Find a way to crawl into your television and live in Hollywood's world of anorexia and height extremes.

For the Sorting Hat, day-to-day life was generally rather peaceful. Apart from the one time a year when he had to sit on students' heads and determine which house they were best suited for, his days were filled with the quiet solitude of the headmaster's office. Every now and then though, the headmaster received a visitor or two that disturbed the Hat's peace and quiet... such as was occurring at the moment.

"I demand you do something about Potter, Albus! One of his friends just assaulted a member of my house, and the things I've seen in his mind..." Severus Snape trailed off, shivering violently. "He's a disturbed, deviant spawn of the devil and I want him out of this school before he corrupts my goddaughter irrevocably. I already dread the next time I'll be facing Lord and Lady Malfoy. Particularly the latter..."

Minerva McGonagall rounded on the sallow, hook-nosed professor with eyes flashing. "What you've 'seen in his mind', Severus? Perhaps we should be starting this discussion with an explanation

as to why you're using legilimency on my students, and then we can move on to whatever complaints you have with members of my house?"

Holding up one hand, Albus Dumbledore waited for the two to turn their attention to him. "Minerva, you know that Severus has my complete trust. I have authorized him to use any and every method at his disposal to ensure the safety of Hogwarts, especially given what we've hidden in the bowels of the school this year, and that includes legilimency. Now Severus, I know you had your problems with both James Potter and Lily Evans when the three of you were in school together... are you certain that your past is not clouding your view of the present?"

"Yes. I've been examining the memory I stumbled upon for a week in a pensieve, and I find it hard to misinterpret." Both Dumbledore and McGonagall gave him their full attention, which caused Snape to pause and fidget uncomfortably. "When I dove into his mind, I found that his mind was shielded... strange but given his mother, not inexplicable. With minor effort, I was able to breach them and the first thing I found was a... that is to say..."

Dumbledore leaned forward, resting his elbows on his desk as he waited for the explanation. "Yes, my boy?"

Grimacing, Snape sighed and gave up on trying to mince words. "I saw him partaking in a sexual encounter. No, he didn't walk in on one. It was from his perspective. It was with not one but two partners, and one had a very familiar shade of red hair. The other had black hair."

McGonagall gasped and leaned back in her chair, eyes bouncing from to Snape to Dumbledore several times. "You can't be suggesting what I think you are, Severus. Harry Potter, sexually abusing... I assume you're referring to one of his sisters when it comes to red hair and perhaps one of her friends for the other girl? I simply don't believe it. How even half of that could happen right under Lily's nose, what with her staying home to raise her children..."

"I won't venture a guess there since I have nothing to base it on. But that is neither here nor there. Tell me, Minerva, do you know where Lily hails from originally?" McGonagall shook her head and Snape

sighed, slouching back in his chair. "The same town as I do. I grew up with her and, as you may or may not remember, we were good friends up until fifth year. While I can't say I knew intimately in the sense that James Potter does, I was very familiar with her body... we used to go swimming and such when school was out and muggle swimming outfits are quite scandalous compared to what the wizarding world finds acceptable. No, I didn't just recognize the hair, I recognized the person." Hands clenching at the arms of his chair, Snape scowled. "Harry Potter is not sexually abusing his younger sisters. Harry Potter is in an Oedipal relationship with his own mother. And the third member of this unholy liaison is one Narcissa Malfoy."

There was a long moment of silence, and then Dumbledore began laughing loudly. "Oh, Severus, I didn't know you had a sense of humor. I haven't had someone trick me so completely since the Weasley twins last semester." He slowly began to trail off as Snape failed to crack a smile. "You are joking, aren't you, Severus?" The potion master shook his head. "Sweet Merlin."

As much as it wanted to, the Hat couldn't keep silent any longer and burst out laughing, drawing all attention to itself. "Oh Severus, you foolish little man. The Potter boy has shields the like of which you wish you could develop. I felt them when we conversed; he had to voluntarily lower them and start the conversation with me before I could sort him. Me. An artifact created by the Founders themselves. Do you really think you of all people have the power to break through shields that I could not? You saw nothing more than what he wanted to show you."

Hopeful blue eyes turned to the hat. "Truly?" Dumbledore rose from his seat, rounding the desk and approaching the Hat's perch. "Are you certain that whatever Severus saw was a deliberate distraction?"

"As certain as I can be without trying to penetrate Potter's mind myself. I have no doubt that if he'd chosen to, he could have forced me to sort him into whatever house he wanted by preparing a mind that would show me just what I was supposed to see. The boy possesses uncanny natural ability in the mental arts." Actually, they were abilities honed with great practice and care, brought over when the seventeen-year-old was stuffed into a younger body in this universe, but the enchantments that forced him to keep the students'

secrets prevented him from saying as much. "Suffice it to say, Severus, that Potter probably knew of your unrequited interest in Lily from discussions with her. Therefore, when you decided to invade his mind, he conjured up a mental image that would both disturb you enough to break the connection and remind you of what you lost. Almost makes me think the boy should have been in Slytherin..."

"And his inclusion of Lady Malfoy?"

"Have you seen that woman? I daydream about her sometimes and I'm an enchanted hat."

Sighing in relief, the headmaster wandered back over to sit in his plush chair. "You see, my boy? It was just a prank, albeit a tasteless one that shows a level of maturity most boys his age lack. I dare say that young Mister Potter takes after his father in more than just looks, hmm? Perhaps in the future, though, you should stay out of his mind just to avoid any further... misunderstandings." Snape scowled but nodded sharply in assent. "Now, Minerva, what did you want to see me about?"

McGonagall eyed Snape for a moment, clearly not thrilled about letting the subject drop, before turning her attention to the headmaster. "I need an exemption from the first year broom ban for two of my students: Hermione Granger and Harry Potter. They're going to be Gryffindor's reserve keeper and starting seeker, respectively, and it would keep me from needing to do something ridiculous. Such as, say, purchasing two Nimbus 2001s for my own use and just happening to loan them out to Granger and Potter regularly."

"Oh yes, that's a brilliant idea. Let's reward the students who disobey their instructors and assault fellow students." Snape lurched up out of his chair and stomped toward the door. "No wonder your house is full of a bunch of little terrors."

Leaning in her seat, McGonagall called back over her shoulder. "Perhaps if your students could manage to walk the halls without starting fights, my students would walk the halls without ending them. Quid pro quo, Severus." The black-clad man paused for a moment before exiting the headmaster's office, slamming the door behind him. McGonagall returned her attention to the man who actually mattered in the situation. "Well, Albus? You know you want to see

what happens when the first muggleborn player in the history of the school takes the pitch."

Grinning, Dumbledore stroked his beard slowly. "It does have the potential to be rather amusing, yes. And I doubt lack of official permission would stop a Potter from bringing a broom onto the grounds now that he's on the team. Very well. Have young Mister Potter write home to ask that his broom be sent to the school. As for Miss Granger, owl Quality Quidditch Supplies for a Nimbus 2001. Have them charge it to my vault."

That brought the conversation to an end and McGonagall rushed from the headmaster's office to deliver her good news. As soon as she was gone, the Sorting Hat chuckled. "You do know that you're going to have to wear me to the Gryffindor versus Slytherin game this year, right?"

"Yes, of course. I might even give all the house elves some time off so they can watch. It promises to be an interesting game. Why?"

"Good. Corner the Weasley twins one day this week and tell them I want to put ten galleons on a Slytherin getting hospitalized if Wood gets knocked out and Granger goes in."

"That, my friend, is what I believe the children call a 'sucker bet'. Besides, what would you do with ten galleons?"

"...bribe one of the house elves to clean me? Honestly, Albus, have you seen me lately? And I think that Longbottom whelp had lice..."

Yawning and stretching languorously, Harry put his feet up on the seat across from him and stared out the window his compartment as his fellow students and their parents bustled up and down Platform Nine and Three-Quarters. Lily and Narcissa had come and gone, dropping off the four of them and departing before the Ministry's 'crack' auror team had even arrived to provide platform security. Not that Harry could blame his mother. She and her ex-husband got on like oil and water now that they no longer had to maintain a pleasant façade for the children and the last thing she needed was to end up as the target of another Rita Skeeter article for causing a scene at King's Cross.

The door to his compartment slid open and four familiar heads peeked in, making Harry grin. "Good morning, Angels."

"Good morning, Harry!"

Chuckling at his friends' now familiar antics, Harry flicked his wand and used a pair of Expansion Charms to stretch the compartment out until it could accommodate ten instead of the normal six. Su was the first to enter the compartment, slinging her travel bag up into the overhead rack followed by Maau Tau Jing's cage and then claiming the spot closest to the windows on the opposite bench. Hermione was next with her own bag and a cat carrier, taking a seat on the same side as Su - albeit at the opposite end - and stretching her legs out over the intervening space. That left the only available seats on his side of the compartment, not that Daphne would have gone anywhere else. As the slender girl took a seat to his right, one hand reached up to tuck some hair behind her ear, revealing the pointed end. "And how is my favorite elf this morning?"

Crossing her arms over her chest, Daphne adopted a mock glare as she stared up at him. "My parents both hate you these days, I hope you know. My father thinks they're 'undignified' and spent money sending me to three different healers and a transfiguration master this summer. No luck, obviously. And Mother read the Lord of the Rings set you bought me last year and is convinced that we're shagging already and this is part of some deviant sex game of ours."

"They obviously don't hate me enough to stop sending offers for your hand in marriage, though." Daphne stuck her tongue out at that, ceding the point. Reaching up, Harry ran his finger along the tip of Daphne's pointed ear, making the strawberry blonde suck in a shuddering breath. "And your mother might be on to something. Although I'd probably have you wear something out of Star Trek... you'd make a cute Vulcan. Personally, I find it hard to get into fantasy fiction anymore."

Squirming in her seat a bit, Daphne turned and buried her face in Harry's neck. After a few deep breaths, she managed to collect herself enough to look up at him curiously - although Harry couldn't help but notice that her pupils were large enough to hide all but the thinnest sliver of her teal irises. "Wait a minute... if you don't like

fantasy stuff, then why did you give me those books? And why do you keep calling me an elf?"

Harry chuckled softly at that. "Do you know what a Vulcan is, Daphne? Not the Roman wizard who pretended to be a god, either, I mean in terms of what we're talking about."

"Well... no."

"And did you like the books?"

"Yes. Although things probably would have been faster if Gandalf had thought to make some brooms or a carpet for them to fly on. They spent far too much walking."

"There you go, then." As Daphne pondered his answers, Harry turned to the girl's half-sister, who was still standing in the doorway and staring his way with an amused look on her face. "Tracey. Good summer?" The Ravenclaw thought about that for a moment before nodding. "Looks like I owe you a new pair of boots. You don't officially win until everyone gets measured this weekend, but since your closest competition is Luna and she had you by over an inch going into this summer, I think it's safe to say that victory is yours."

Tracey chuckled at that, moving to sit between Daphne and the window on his side of the compartment. "As much as I love a nice expensive pair of shoes... and as much as I hate being the shortest one in the group... I think I'm going to have to pass the victory to Luna or Cassie. The point was high heels to help the shortest girl feel taller and the idea of wearing anything with heels makes me wince. I mean, between the combination of all those stairs at Hogwarts and..." Trailing off, Tracey looked downward. "...these..."

Looking over the top of Daphne's head at Tracey, Harry's eyes flicked from the top of one girl to the other. "Yeah, I wasn't going to say anything until I was in a position where Daphne wasn't holding me in place for your curses, but you've both grown since the end of fifth year. Daphne upward and you..." His gaze dropped for a moment before sliding back up to meet her eyes and he gave her a sheepish smile. "...yeah."

Smirking, Tracey reached up and nudged the neckline of her blue t-shirt to one side so she could tug gently on the strap of her black bra.

"Mmm. Evidently this year is being brought to us by the number thirty-six and the letter E."

Harry and Hermione's jaws both dropped at that but it was Hermione who managed a response first. "...you just violated one of my favorite childhood memories. DirtySesame Street jokes, Tracey? Are you fucking serious?"

"I believe Anastasiya Black would take exception if Tracey tried that..." Laughing as Hermione groaned at the deliberate misinterpretation of her question, Harry looked over to find the leader of his group's younger year standing in the compartment's doorway, a smirk tugging at her lips. Even now, after almost five years in her presence, Harry was still amazed at how different this version of Luna looked. It wasn't just the different hair color and dark makeup, either; she joined Daphne, Su, and to a lesser degree Tracey in being one of the people who looked incredibly different in this world. Two of them actually appeared to be a matched pair: Luna seemingly served as a cosmic scale balancer, making up for the fact that this universe's Daphne was so slim by being as voluptuous as his universe's Daphne had been. Well, she wasn't quite at that Daphne's level of voluptuousness yet, but she was well on her way for someone her age. Glancing over at Tracey, who apparently had gotten all the good genes in the family this time around, Harry idly wondered if Luna would ever catch up with the exceedingly curvy Ravenclaw but personally doubted it. What were the odds of two girls in his little circle of friends both ending up that lucky? Although both Luna and Su were shaping up to be pretty damn lucky in their own right. Twirling a strand of long black hair around her finger, she shot an unreadable look at Daphne before taking a seat on the opposite side of Harry and latching onto his arm. "Hullo."

Harry squeezed Luna's leg, thumb running up and down over the green and silver candy cane tights she had opted to wear even without the rest of her uniform, before looking back over at the doorway. Doing his best to imitate her Scottish accent, he waved the waiting girl in. "Aw'right, Lara?"

"Oye, you really need to stop doing that, Harry. You sound ridiculous." Harry offered Lara a two-fingered salute for that

comment, narrowly dodging her retaliatory kick as she entered the compartment. Giving Lara a quick look over, Harry raised an eyebrow at her newest attempt to deal with her piebaldism. Her trademark white streak was finally gone, split in half and framing her face, the left streak dyed purple and the right streak gold. He'd heard her muttering about laser surgery towards the end of last year and indeed, the lenses held in place by her purple plastic frames this year seemed thinner than the ones he'd seen her with previously, getting rid of the same bug-eyed look she'd previously shared with Trelawney. And Lara being Lara, the outfit wasn't complete without one of her seemingly endless supply of purple and gold Pride of Portree shirts. Lara took up a spot by Hermione's feet, the older girl bumping Lara's butt with one trainer. "Nighean na galla." Harry raised an eyebrow and waited for the catfight to break out, but evidently Hermione still hadn't picked up enough Scottish Gaelic from Lara yet to know what that meant. Which he supposed was for the best. "So? Where are the twins? And your albino shadow?"

Rolling his eyes at Lara's nickname for his cousin, Harry shrugged. "Not sure on either count. Tara's got her own friends in Slytherin and so she could be sitting with them for once. The spare seat is here for her if she wants it, though... assuming she gets here before Cassie does. As for the twins, same thing. They're probably saying hello to their dormmates and..."

"Speak of the devil..." Hermione was staring off down the hallway at something Harry couldn't see from where he was sitting, but the answer to his unspoken question came only a few seconds later as his sisters arrived. Jasmine was first, Albiona's cage in hand and her shorter hair brushing against her chin as she looked around, with Rose waiting patiently behind her and playing with the end of her long red braid. Raising her pierced brow, Jasmine tapped her foot impatiently and Hermione quickly shifted to sit normally against the wall, freeing up two spots between her and Lara. After wrestling Albiona's cage up into the luggage rack, Jasmine took the spot beside Hermione, finally allowing Rose to enter and take the remaining seat in the middle of the row. "So..."

Giggling, Jasmine opened her mouth and stuck her tongue out for a few seconds before retracting it. "Yup. All healed, too. I had to get it done by muggles in London because the one woman in Diagon Alley who does piercings had never even heard of someone getting their tongue pierced, but I wasn't too worried since Mum got her

ears done the muggle way when she was a kid and... well, she's not dead yet."

Before the conversation could progress any further down a road that would surely lead to him ending up knowing things he really didn't want to know about his little sister's love life - and possibly a certain someone nagging him to get his tongue pierced too - the compartment door slid open once more to reveal both of his cousins. Harry looked over at the single remaining seat to Luna's left and then at the pair of girls in the doorway before shrugging. There was nothing saying Tara was doing anything more than showing Cassie to where they were or that Cassie wasn't just stopping by to say hi before going to meet her yearmates. And if they both wanted the one seat... well, they were big girls now. They could figure it out for themselves. "Ladies."

Tara and Cassie immediately tried to force themselves through the door at the same time, making Harry groan. That was followed by the pair turning in sync and diving for the last seat, Cassie letting out an 'oof' as Tara's larger form landed on top of her. "Ouch! Damn it, you've gotten to ride with them for the last five years, Tara. I've only been at Hogwarts for a year and Harry wouldn't let me ride with you last September because he said I needed to meet my new peers. Give me a chance."

"There's no need to fight, girls. Or crush each other." Rising from her seat, Luna took a step to the right and plopped herself down on Harry's lap, leaving her spot free for Tara. "There. Room for everybody." Twisting, she brought her head down to rest on Harry's shoulder and curled her legs up under her on his lap. "So, how was everyone's summer?"

Even as the others began offering accounts of their respective holidays, a soft growl made Harry look down at where Daphne was glaring at a smirking Luna. The black-haired Slytherin stuck out her tongue in response, which caused Daphne to press herself even more closely against Harry's side before returning the favor. Leaning his head back, Harry looked up at the ceiling and sighed in exasperation. Some days, it was so hard being him.

Eyes snapping open, Harry lay motionless for a moment before leaning over and grabbing the small spiral bound notebook he'd

taken to recording his dreams in. Ever since the night of his arrival at Hogwarts, he'd started having a series of very similar dreams that remained crystal clear in his memory upon waking and had taken to recording the details and tracking how they matched up. He wasn't quite sure it was full blown oneiromancy yet - his dreams seemed to be straightforward delivery of information, rather than anything that required interpreting - but it was looking more and more likely that he'd picked up some sort of divinatory ability somewhere along the line.

Using his wand for light, Harry began adding more hash marks next to things he'd dreamt about on previous nights, adding two new observations to the bottom of the list for future consideration. Luna being sorted into Slytherin was surprisingly common in his dreams; she'd been a Ravenclaw in only one of the dreams she'd had since mid July and - surprisingly enough - a Gryffindor twice. For some odd reason she seemed to enjoy borrowing Bellatrix Lestrange's fashion sense in the dreams where she was a member of Slytherin. What the hell that meant, Harry had no idea whatsoever.

Cassie, as best he could tell from his scattered dreams, would be attending Beauxbatons for her first three years of schooling - one of which would be spent in the school's carriage on Hogwarts grounds - before returning to her father's alma mater in Harry's fifth year. The twins were destined to individuate considerably by his sixth year according to all his dreams, but still had enough in common to find Hermione attractive... and were still similar enough that Hermione apparently found them both dateable. Which twin she was going to end up with varied on a daily basis, however. Daphne was going to be of average height and slim, with a fifty-fifty chance of him messing with her ears for giggles. Su was going to grow up to be far hotter than her original self, Tara took after her mother in looks, and Tracey... sweet Merlin. Lara was going to be... Lara. Blissfully familiar, as far as he could tell.

By the time he finished, his internal clock was telling him it was time to rise and shine. Casting a tempus proved this to be true and Harry tucked the notebook away before yawning, stretching, and sliding out of bed. Shower time, and then he had a letter home to write.

Mum,

Sorry I hadn't written you before this but it's just been one thing after another. I was sorted into Gryffindor, just like you and Dad were. I figure you're probably proud of me. If you're not... lie. It'll make me feel better. Tell the twins I miss them... kinda sorta. They're a bit like fungus: they grow on you after a while. Oh, but I definitely miss Dora. Make sure she knows that. If you can tell the three of them both parts at once, that's even better.

Hogwarts is fun so far. It's a hell of a hike up to Gryffindor Tower but I've been doing it for seven years and so it's not really a shock the way it probably is for my classmates. Oh, and I've got a housemate who reminds me a lot of you. She's a muggleborn, absolutely brilliant, prefers trousers, and isn't afraid to stand up for what she believes in. Neville Longbottom called her a mudblood and she knocked a few of his teeth out. Wicked, huh?

That reminds me... Evans Charm? How much money have you made off that and does Dad know?

Oh, back to the vaunted Boy-Who-Took-One-To-The-Forehead... being in Gryffindor means I have to share a dorm with the prat. He reminds me of how you describe Dad when he was younger: an arrogant bully, but not a particularly intelligent one at that. So far, Hermione's punched his teeth out and Daphne Greengrass - you should remember her from the tea party I had with Tara - hit him in the face with a stunner. And when he threatened to go after them, one of the prefects disarmed him and sent his wand to Professor McGonagall. Hopefully he'll get better as the year goes on, or one of us might not leave the school alive in June.

If Dad is actually around to see you read this, pretend I actually put in something about him. Since he's probably not, I didn't bother. And make sure you give Cissy my regards next time she's over. Although with the way things have been going lately, she's probably there right now. In which case... hi, Mother. Don't worry, I'm doing my best to include Tara. Or as included as she can be without causing problems for her with the other baby snakes.

By the way, I kinda sorta may have become the youngest seeker in a century after Professor McGonagall saw me during flying lessons. So I'm sending Albiona along too; she can help Silver Star haul my broom up to the school. And before you think I'm joking, try and remember that all this has happened before. All I had to do was put myself in the right place at the right time to make sure it all happened again.

Love you,
Harry

A day later, Harry found himself staring up at the hourglasses and shaking his head in disgust as he took in the loss of points his house had suffered overnight. "Why do I have a feeling that the person behind this has a name that starts with an 'L' and rhymes with 'ongbottom'?" A repeat of the incident where Draco had tricked him into being caught by Filch, he assumed, just played out by Carrow and Longbottom. Perhaps someone else would know for sure, though?

Hermione shook her head mutely, staring up at the point totals in horror, and neither Su nor Daphne could provide an answer either. A familiar voice from behind them, though, came through with the explanation. "I was in the hospital wing for a checkup when Longbottom got brought in with his broken wrist. Madam Pomfrey ended up going back and forth between us because I just needed diagnostic spells and he needed a series of charms applied that took a few minutes each to run their course. He got done a minute or two before me and just as I was walking out the door, I heard the end of Carrow reminding him of the time and place of a duel. Would have been last night. Considering Neville saw me and knew I heard, I didn't think he'd be stupid enough to go through with it. Evidently I was wrong."

"Yes, well, the wizarding world has a potion or spell to cure almost anything, but you can't fix stupid. What I want to know is how I slept through him sneaking out. And who he took with him." Harry ran his eyes over the Gryffindor table, spotting Neville and an equally subdued looking Larry beside him. "Never mind. Think I just figured it out." Turning his attention back to his favorite prefect - mostly because Percy was a stiff and he didn't even know the names of the other four - Harry smiled. "So, Cherise, did Pomfrey give you a clean bill of health?"

Raising her arms, the blonde twisted back and forth slowly. "Yep. I'll still get winded easily for a few more weeks but that has to do more with the stress of my body healing itself, not any injury I actually suffered." Harry nodded but was inwardly unhappy; Cherise had come out of the hospital wing after only three days and sporting unblemished skin. The wizarding world could do a lot medically, but if Cherise had been attacked by Fluffy... either she would have

gotten away easily enough that she wouldn't have spent more than a night in Pomfrey's care or she would have looked like ground beef after. But she didn't have a - visible - mark on her. So what the hell had attacked her and how did he get around it when the time came? "Anyways, since if I go over there I'll probably say something I'll lose my badge over, tell the little git that if I catch him sneaking out of bed again after curfew, I'll start using Sticking Charms to keep him in bed. And Merlin forbid he have to go to the loo in the middle of the night."

The mental image made Harry chuckle and he inclined his head. "Will do. But now... I know how Hermione despises anything that gets between her and her food. To breakfast we go." Cherise waved a hand to dismiss them and the quartet of first years made their way over to the end of the Gryffindor table. "So, Hermione, ready for training tonight?"

"Hell no." Hermione scowled as she spooned eggs onto her plate before fixing him with a glare. "You could just owl home and get a broom sent up here. There's no way my parents could just run over and grab me one from Diagon Alley or something, if they can even afford it. I mean, we're well off but I didn't even think to check broom prices because I knew I couldn't bring one and..."

Owls hooted overhead and Harry looked up to find two teams of owls hard at work: Albiona and Silver Star tag-teaming his own Nimbus 2000 from home and a trio of smaller owls grasping a similarly shaped but paper-wrapped package as they descended towards the table. "Hermione?" She looked up and he grinned as her eyes widened. "I don't think a broom is going to be a problem."

Hermione jumped up, food forgotten, standing on the bench so she could grab what was obviously a broom as soon as the owls drew close enough. The trio hooted indignantly as their cargo was stolen, buffeting her upside the head with their wings before flying up and out of the hall. Tearing the paper off, she gasped as she dropped back into her seat, thrusting the broom into Harry's face. "Harry! Look! A Nimbus 2001!"

"Hermione! Look! A Nimbus 2000!" Harry waved his own broom in her face, grinning with exaggerated enthusiasm, until she gave him the two-fingered salute and huffed, dropping the broom on the table. "I know you're excited, but try not to act like Longbottom would. Yes, you have a broom. So do I. Neither of us is supposed to. So let's

have a bit more class than some people here would, and not make a big deal about it, okay?"

Sighing, Hermione took the broom and slid it off the table to hide between herself and Su even as Harry moved his to rest between himself and Daphne. "Fine. But I reserve the right to brag to Carrow that his stupid stunt got the two of us on the Gryffindor quidditch team."

"Only if I'm there to see his face."

"Deal."

After dinner that evening, the pair retrieved their brooms from their respective dorms and, after saying goodbye to Su and Daphne, made their way down to the pitch. It was just as impressive now as Harry remembered it being every other time he'd visited, with its golden hoops on fifty foot tall poles and stands with seats for hundreds. "Ready, Hermione?"

Hermione huffed, swinging the massive bag she had slung over one shoulder and nailing him square in the back. The impact made him stumble forward, causing her to snicker. "For the tenth time in the last five minutes, yes. Now shut up. The more you ask that, the more nervous I get."

"Exactly." Harry grinned at her as he straightened up. "If you're nervous and end up not flying well, it'll make me look better by comparison." Not that he needed that kind of help; they were both good fliers but he was admittedly the far superior one. Not that a keeper needed to have his level of skill. She possessed enough natural skill to handle herself in front of the goals for now and would only get better with experience.

Swinging her bag back and forth, Hermione's eyes narrowed. "I see. What a cunning, cunning plan you have there. And what if I knock you out before we get to practice?" To emphasize her threat, Hermione lunged, letting her bag swing forward towards him again.

Harry dodged her second attack and began to walk away quickly, hoping to stay out of the reach of that downright painful bag of hers. "Then you get to explain to Professor McGonagall why her star

seeker is in the hospital wing. Either way, I win and you lose." Hermione growled softly and Harry laughed, hauling arse across the lawn towards where six figures were clustered at the base of one of the stands. "C'mon, they're waiting for us."

Unlike in his original timeline, this time the entire existing Gryffindor quidditch team had turned out for his first practice. The Weasley twins didn't look quite as welcoming as he would have thought, but then again he wasn't their little brother's friend this time around. Katie, Angelina, and Alicia seemed more intent on dissecting Hermione with their eyes than paying attention, which was fine with him. Hermione would need to learn to deal with that sort of intent scrutiny before the first time she played for a crowd. And Wood was waiting with the crate full of balls, ready to kick things off. "Right then. I assume you both have enough of an idea that I can skip the basics? Positions, the kinds of balls, common fouls, and so on?"

"Right. If Hermione needs anything explained, she can ask me. Doubt that'll happen, though. She's read a few books and... well, now she's downright scary when it comes to quidditch knowledge." Harry instinctively ducked, letting Hermione's hand fly through the spot his head had just occupied before straightening up again. "Hey, Wood, Hogwarts uses the international standard rulebook, right?"

Wood looked puzzled at the odd question, scratching his head for a moment before nodding. "Best I can tell, yeah. I can ask Madam Hooch if it's really important, Potter. Why?"

Nodding his head towards Hermione, Harry tapped one hand against the top of her bag. "There's another reason I asked the professor if we could have Hermione as our backup keeper. Hermione, gear up?"

"Yes, Master. Right away, Master. Would you like some tea and biscuits while I'm at it, Master?" The chasers giggled at Hermione's antics and Harry made a show of tilting his head to the side, pondering it. "If you answer that last question, I will come up into your dorm in the middle of the night and kick you right out of bed onto the stone floor."

Hermione dragged her bag a few feet across the lawn before plopping down beside it, unzipping it and stuffing her hands inside. Wood let out a low whistle. "She's a feisty one. Some poor boy's

going to have his hands full with her in a few years." The others chuckled and Harry shook his head; if they only knew. Pulling out a long, rectangular blue object, Hermione pressed it against her left leg and began fiddling with a set of straps. "What's she doing?"

Rubbing his hands together, Harry gestured to his legs. "We wear pads, right? The dragonhide ones, kinda slim?" Oliver nodded. "But in the international rulebook... there's no rules about the pads we wear, other than that they can't be charmed, enchanted, cursed, or otherwise modified during the match itself. Those... are muggle field hockey goalkeeper leg guards. I'll bet you my Nimbus that she can take a bludger to the legs with those on and shrug it off."

The Weasley twins perked up at that one. "Deal! Except I don't know..."

"...what the two of us would do..."

"...with only one Nimbus. Care to..."

"...throw hers into the bet too?"

"Considering I like breathing? No. No I don't." The twins looked at Hermione and winced. Even they weren't brave enough to challenge her, it appeared. Harry turned his attention back to Oliver. "And yes I know, leg injuries aren't that big a deal for you. But... she also has a blocker for her arm. One right now, but we can get her a second." He gestured to where Hermione had moved on to what looked like a glove with part of a leg guard mounted on the back, covering the top of her forearm from elbow to wrist with a wide protective barrier. "There's no rule dictating..."

"...the forearm guards we can wear, as long as they don't have an active enchantment. Bloody hell, how come nobody else has thought of this?" Wood seemed utterly appalled that a pair of first years had come up with something his own quidditch-obsessed mind hadn't. Hermione pulled a last object out of her bag and Oliver groaned. "A helmet. The rules allow for a helmet but most of us don't wear them because they fell out of favor at some point and nobody wants to be made fun of for being the only person on the pitch wearing one."

Harry nodded and gestured for Wood to step back, leaning down in front of his team captain and opening the chest containing the quidditch balls. After grabbing a beater bat, Harry flicked the restraints off one of the bludgers and got ready. "Yeah, but Hermione doesn't want her frighteningly intelligent brain splattered across the pitch and I can sympathize. Hey, Hermione! Think fast!" Bringing the bat forward, Harry batted the bludger her way.

Shrieking, Hermione brought up her blocker into the path of the bludger... and deflected it up and over her head. The impact forced her back a step and she grunted in either exertion or pain, Harry wasn't sure, but it hadn't snapped her arm like a twig and she was still on her feet. That was good news. Then the ball came back around, nailing her in the back of the head and knocking her off her feet. She lay facedown on the grass for a moment before holding up her right hand. "I'm alright!"

"And that was just proof of concept." Harry lazily batted the oncoming bludger up into the air, away from the rest of the team. "We can get her pads with the outer layer made of dragonhide, which will make the pads even stronger. She'll be unstoppable. And look at that, Wood. She took a bludger to the skull and she's still awake. She's got one up on you, eh?"

Eyes wide, Wood looked around at the rest of the team, barely even noticing as Harry batted away the bludger mere moments before it would have nailed him in the face. "If anyone else thinks that was bloody amazing, raise your hand."

Five hands went up.

Joe's Note: Yes, I know the popular spelling is Samhain. Given Hogwarts is in Scotland, I opted to go with the Scottish Gaelic variation. So shoot me. Also, I know the troll bit is a bit shorter than last time but that's a necessary evil given the reset universe I'm working with. But next chapter we get the Gryffindor vs. Slytherin quidditch match. So if you're waiting to see if the Sorting Hat is right... one more chapter, my friends.

Time passed for Harry just as quickly as the first time around, with lessons and thrice-weekly quidditch practices to attend, and before he knew it two months had passed. As the end of October approached, though, he became aware of a major deviation in the timeline. Instead of the normal Halloween feast, complete with decorations provided by the professors, a contingent of parents led by his mother and Narcissa Malfoy descended on the castle to organize and execute a Samhuinn festival.

It made sense to Harry. His mother was supposedly one of the brightest witches to come through Hogwarts in recent years. It stood to reason that after graduation, even if she did go on to become 'merely' a housewife who occasionally sold off her charms work, she could still produce ripple effects in the time stream. In this case, she'd gathered up the other housewives who had sent their children off to school and put them to work creating a festival at which all parents could come, visit their children, and meet the teachers responsible for the formative years of said children. Even the muggleborns' parents would be included, thanks to a special run by the Hogwarts Express.

As much as he liked the idea of seeing his family again, the whole thing presented an enormous problem for Harry. Would Quirrell unleash the troll in the dungeons again to cover his move for the Philosopher's Stone? That wouldn't make any sense; they could simply lock the school down with the residents outside enjoying the festival and he'd either be trapped outside or stuck with the rest of the professors as they tracked down the troll. But then if he let the troll out into the assembled students and their families, people might get hurt. What then, though, Harry wondered. Should he let it happen and write it off as an acceptable price to pay to keep his abilities secret? Or should he intervene and damn the consequences?

Sighing, Harry guided his Nimbus in slow, lazy circles over the Hogsmeade train station, watching as a crew laid out an engine and cars for the train that would be running to London and back. A pair of wizards slowly moved down the line, one hovering each piece as the other enlarged it from a small, toy-like construct into the full-grown version. Two things immediately jumped out at him about what the two were doing. Firstly, there were only four cars instead of seven... but if only the muggleborns' parents were using it - or perhaps just muggleborns' parents and a few half 'n half couples for whom King's Cross was easier to access than a floo - they wouldn't need nearly as much seating capacity. Also, the gleaming scarlet steam engine was gone, replaced with a boxy green tank engine. But then again, with fewer cars, it was probably easier to use a smaller engine. Wow, that was actually somewhat logical. Harry hadn't thought the wizarding world capable of such a thing.

A glint of metal caught his eye and Harry floated a bit further down the tracks, discovering another engine waiting separate from the rest of the train. He'd thought it odd that the green engine was resting on the tracks facing Hogwarts... maybe they were going to use two smaller engines and the crew would hop from one engine to the other after getting to London so they were always facing forward? Except... Harry drifted down the length of the engine, made a wide turn around the front and drifted back along the other side. This new engine was easily the size of the scarlet locomotive that normally pulled the Hogwarts Express, painted up in the colors of the Pride of Portree: purple with gold trim and lettering. 'MF&E 1' was painted on a stretch of metal just beyond the cab, but it was the tender that made him blink: 'MacFusty & Evans'. "What the bloody hell?"

"Language, Harry." Emerging from the cab, Lily turned her back on him long enough to descend a set of steps before dropping to the ground. Rubbing the back of her hand over her cheek and leaving a thick black streak, she waved him down. Harry obeyed, circling back around towards her as he did his best not to laugh at the blue overalls and matching hat she was wearing. "So, Harry, whatever happened to wanting to be more like me than your father?"

Still fighting to avoid laughing at her odd appearance, Harry came in for a landing next to the train tracks and hopped off his broom, swinging it up gracefully to rest on one shoulder. "What, I can't play quidditch and be at the top of every class I'm taking at the same time?"

Lily pondered that one for a moment, tapping her finger against her chin, leaving a new set of smudges. "You know, I'm pretty sure it'd violate some law of reality in the muggle world. Here... who knows?" She shrugged. "Just didn't see it coming after your sudden change in priorities this summer."

"Yeah, well, I'm doing well in all my classes. Top of everything except Potions and that's because Snape is a bastard. Even with doing my homework and helping my friends, I still have plenty of spare time and so why not quidditch? It was one of my favorite parts of Hogwarts last time around and it'll keep me busy and out of trouble until third year, when I can finally start some new classes." Harry watched as his mother shook her head in amusement before turning back to the engine she'd been working on, at which point he noticed something. Her hair wasn't in its normal simple ponytail today, but instead a thick braid that descended further down her back than he thought her hair reached. "Did you do something to your hair?"

Reaching up, Lily toyed with the braid for a moment before going back to work on something that reminded Harry of the pistons he'd seen under the hood of his uncle's car a few times. "Well, our Harry once grew his hair back overnight after I tried to save some time and money by cutting his hair myself and really messed it up... did that happen to you too?" Harry nodded; actually, Petunia had done it deliberately but they didn't need to get into the mess that was his former home life. "People seem to think 'accidental' magic goes away when you get older... but that's a horrible name for it because it's not an accident. It's merely your subconscious harnessing your innate magical power to express your inner desires."

"And this has precisely what to do with anything?"

Lily shot a narrow eyed look back over her shoulder and Harry pantomimed zipping his lips. After a second, she returned both to her work and her explanation. "Well, without Lucius around as much to berate her about what 'a proper lady of the House of Malfoy' should look like, Narcissa's hair has been growing back out to look more like she did at Hogwarts - wait till you see her tonight; you won't even recognize her - and I guess that on some level I like it enough that my body's mimicking her and speeding up my own

growth to match. Not as much as hers, but enough that I need a braid to keep from getting it tangled in things."

Nodding, Harry hopped back onto his broom and drifted skyward again as Lily returned to her tinkering. "Anyways, getting back to the whole quidditch and good grades thing... if you think what I'm doing is odd? My friend Hermione ranks between second and fourth in every class, is the reserve keeper, and she's a muggleborn to boot. She didn't come in with the advantage that most purebloods have from their parents and she's still kicking everyone's arse. Well, everyone else's arse."

"Language, Harry. And that's good to hear, especially after what you told me about underage magic use. I've been trying to come up with ways to help muggleborn students stay on a more even footing. You still friends with the two pureblood girls you wrote home about last month? Daphne and Su?" Harry nodded before realizing she couldn't see him and responding with an affirmative noise. "Remind me to speak with them. And Hermione, of course. Maybe they can help me see things I'm missing because I'm old."

As Lily finally finished with whatever she was adjusting and climbed back into the locomotive's cab, Harry floated down to hover beside the window. "You're not old, Mum. You're what, thirty-one years old? And Dumbledore's closing in on a century and a quarter? You've still got at least two thirds of your life left to live, more than that if you take after him." He gestured to the silent and cold engine. "Now this... this is old. And bloody odd looking. What is it?"

Lily stuck her head out the cab's window and looked up at him as she slapped her hand against the outside of the cab, right over the markings. "It belongs to the reserve on the Isle of Skye where they keep Hebridean Black dragons. I think it's called a Heisler? Not sure, to be honest; the MacFustys just call it the 'Flower of Scotland'. It's some kind of special locomotive the Americans came up with for working in the mountains for mining and logging back in the day. They went to Mexico and saved it from where the original muggle owners had left it rusting in a junkyard, and then shipped it over here because the reserve has some pretty rough terrain. I'm not sure if you know, but I have a bit of a thing for trains..."

"I never would have guessed from those oh so fascinating lectures you gave back in August..."

"...and so when they owed me looking for someone who was good with charms and willing to experiment with muggle machinery, I jumped at the chance. I've been working on it on a really short stretch of track out behind the house; it'll get a short test by pulling the train a third of the way to London and then I'll shrink it and bring it back to the house. I'm hoping to have it finished by the start of summer for them and then next fall, when you're all in school and I'll have more free time, I was going to talk to the Ministry about seeing what my options were for reaching out to the muggle government and Network Rail. I'd love to get a siding off the Maritime Line straight into that empty stretch out back, and then I could open myself up to the muggle heritage railways to fix their steam engines up too. After all, I'm doing most of the Flower the muggle way already. Sure, I couldn't give muggle engines tenders that held more water and coal than they should, and I couldn't layer charms that help keep the innards clean and decrease the need for maintenance, but those are just added perks. The Flower would function without them. The whole thing wouldn't be cheap, of course, but James has more galleons than he knows what to do with. We could afford it. Oh, and as long as we're on the subject of money... I went to Gringotts and spoke with one of the financial advisers about doing some investing in the muggle world. Are you sure putting half my life savings into this 'Apple' company is worth it? Don't they make those computers that pretty much nobody buys?"

Blinking a bit at his mother's sudden and complete change of topic, Harry quickly recovered and drew his wand, conjuring a white plastic rectangle that was a bit over four inches tall, two and a half inches wide, and three-quarters of an inch thick. He held it out to Lily and waited while she examined it, knowing she wouldn't make much out of it. "Sometime around now, they're going to make something that small that lets a muggle put a thousand songs in their pocket and walk around listening for hours. I'm not sure exactly when; the Dursleys got Dudley his first for Christmas in my first year, so some time between now and then. The whale went through at least three of them in four years that I know of because, well, evidently they can only survive being sat on if you weigh less than one tonne. The last I heard about them, they were even slimmer, could hold and show pictures, let you watch movies, and sales were over one hundred million and going strong."

Lily let out a low whistle before looking up at him with wide eyes and a gleeful smile. "I'm gonna be rich."

Gnawing idly on a piece of chicken, Harry tried to let his guard down and simply enjoy the evening, basking in the heat of the nearby bonfire and examining the faces glowing in the soft orange light. Daphne sat to his left, trying her damndest to be civilized while picking away at a plate of food using her fingers, with Tracey beside her and Hermione and Su sitting off to his right. Tara had actually decided to sit behind him, leaning back against him so she could relax without falling over backwards. Lazy witch.

Amusingly enough, a few yards away Mister Granger was likewise surrounded by women, his wife sitting by his side as a loose half-circle of friendly witches chatted with them: Narcissa, Lily, Lady Greengrass, Missus Davis, and one Harry didn't recognize but who Lily and Narcissa were obviously friends with. Sitting on opposite sides of the group, James and Lucius were too busy glaring over their respective wives' heads at each other to eat, while Lord Greengrass had staked out a spot halfway between the two groups and was alternating his attention between his wives and where Harry was sitting next to his daughter. Mister and Missus Li weren't present for the festivities; out of country on work business according to Su, who didn't seem all too upset about their absence. And, much to his chagrin, Harry hadn't recognized the curvy witch with long black curls who was sitting beside his mother until Narcissa looked his way and smiled. Thank God he hadn't placed a bet with his mother on that one or he'd be out some gold right now.

All in all, it was the perfect evening... unless one was waiting for a random-yet-not troll attack.

At this point, Harry was almost hoping for a homicidal troll to start causing a ruckus. He'd been on guard since the elves and organizing parents had hauled out the evening feast onto the lawn and the bonfires had been lit and if he'd wasted all night waiting for something to happen and it didn't, he was going to be severely pissed off.

Daphne opened her mouth, no doubt to remind him that retrieving drinks for one's female companions was the gentlemanly thing to do, when Harry was saved by the bell. Or in this case, the possessed professor. "Troll! In the dungeons! Thought you ought to know..."

And just like the first time around, Quirrell completed his performance by pretending to pass out, although onto the comparatively soft lawn instead of the stone floor of the Great Hall this time.

Like a shot, Dumbledore was up out of the throne-like chair he'd been occupying and gathering the professors to him. Tapping his wand to his throat, he magnified his voice so it echoed across the grounds. "Do not panic! If there truly is a troll inside the school, there are defenses in place that are capable of containing it until the staff and I can deal with it. Remain outside where it is safe and please try to enjoy the remainder of your evening while we handle this matter."

"Stay here, children. You too, Lily. The school's a big place and Dumbledore's going to need help searching it. I'll be back when things are dealt with." Harry opened his mouth to protest but his father just waved his hand dismissively as he passed. "Just stay out here where it's safe, okay?"

Harry wanted to debate the 'safe' part of remaining out here... tell him that Quirrell being out here made it inherently unsafe... remind him that there were only a few ways into the castle and only one big enough for a troll, meaning it had been intentionally brought in a while ago and not snuck in... but he couldn't. Not without revealing himself. So instead, Harry just scowled and remained seated on the grass as he watched his father join up with the Longbottoms and a few other auror parents before following the headmaster and professors into the school. "Don't panic." Harry scoffed. "At his age, he should know better. Of course they're going to panic now. If there wasn't something wrong, he wouldn't be yelling 'don't panic'."

Ignoring the odd looks his friends gave him, Harry noticed his mother and Narcissa approaching and rose to his feet, moving to meet them and causing Tara to flop back onto the grass as her support abandoned her. Lily pulled him in for a hug, but Harry knew she was after more than physical reassurance of his well-being. "What the hell is going on?"

"No clue. In my timeline, it's not like you were around to organize this with Cissy. Quirrell released a troll into the dungeons so that the teachers and students would be occupied and he could make a run at the Philosopher's Stone, but now? He's locked out here with the rest of us... but he had to have known that would happen, so why

even bother?" Harry looked over at Quirrell, noticing the man's eyes were open and his mouth moving as a sickly green light emerged from his tightly clenched fist. Then the professor slammed his hand down against the grass, causing a flash of light that was mostly hidden by his body, and Harry swore under his breath. A warding crystal; smaller than a ward stone but far easier to activate and transport. "Well whatever his plan is, I think he's making his move."

A moment later, Harry was proven right as the ground trembled and screams broke out all around him, with the highest concentration amongst those who'd been sitting near... "Trolls! Trolls in the Forbidden Forest!" Huh. A bit too convoluted for his tastes, but he had to admit the idea had potential. Send the capable adults on a fool's errand and then make them rush right back out to engage in the real fight, leaving them exhausted and the school ripe for the robbing. Harry flicked his wrist, wand jumping into his hand. There was just one flaw in Quirrell's plan.

He hadn't taken into account that someone might remain behind to handle the trolls.

Someone like Harry.

Watching as the trolls slowly lumbered their way across the lawn, spreading out in a way that would spread any defenders as thin as possible trying to contain them, Harry shook his head as the crowd devolved into a rampaging mob of sheep rushing for the edge of the grounds. Well, at least there'd be less witnesses and people in his way. His friends, on the other hand... Harry wasn't even going to waste his breath attempting to convince them to leave. Especially since the Greengrasses and Missus Davis had abandoned Daphne and Tracey and Lucius had likewise left Narcissa and Tara behind in his flight to safety. His friends, like Hermione's muggle parents, would be safer where they were. As long as they stayed close, he could protect them.

Various plans and pieces of plans whirled through his brain at top speed - the need to defeat the trolls, the need to safeguard his peers and their parents, the need to protect his own secrets, the need to secure Quirrell - before everything suddenly snapped together and Harry knew exactly what he had to do. "Mum, stun Quirrell. I don't need him getting involved. Think up a good excuse." Lily held his gaze for a moment before nodding, breaking away and moving

across the lawn toward the prone professor. "Alright, girls, I need you to hurl whatever you can think of at the trolls. If you can't come up with anything, watch someone else and imitate them. Aunt Cissy, I need your help with something exceptionally stupid and dangerous."

Before he could put his plan into motion, Hermione reached out and grabbed Harry by the wrist. "Hey! Not that I mind something a bit less stupid than 'let's run around in circles screaming like idiots' for a plan... but who died and left you king?"

"Simple. I have a plan. Do you?" Harry watched as Hermione opened her mouth, shut it, opened it again, and then closed it again before shaking her head. "Didn't think so. Now start rounding those trolls up for me. I need them all in one place and away from the people. Aunt Cissy, with me." Hermione released his wrist as she joined the other girls in sending a hail of spells racing over the lawn in an effort to attract the trolls' attention. Rubbing his wrist, Harry jerked his head and began walking away as Narcissa followed. She may have been his friend, Harry mused, but Hermione really needed to learn to watch her strength. As soon as they were far enough away to not be overheard, Harry turned to Narcissa. "I'm going to hex the trolls and then you're going to hex me."

"Not that I haven't been looking for an excuse ever since that shocker of a spell you ended our fight with back in August, but I'm pretty sure Lily would lock me out of the wards if I hurt you. And I enjoy having an active sex life again too much to throw it away over some trolls." Harry shuddered and Narcissa cuffed his shoulder lightly. "Oh hush. You know you weren't delivered by owl or something. Adults have sex. Your mother has sex."

Harry shook his head vehemently. "No she doesn't. You and my mother do not have sex. My mother and father have never had sex. I was delivered by a ruddy huge owl, so were the twins, and nothing you can say will convince me otherwise." Laughing at his denial, Narcissa gestured to the trolls that were slowly making their way towards the spell-throwing irritants and Harry nodded. "Don't worry, you're not going to hex me with anything horrible. I only need you to use a simple Exhaustion Hex. I'm going to cast three spells and then I want you to make it look like I passed out from the strain. When I wake up, we'll blame what I did on a combination of my wand and adrenaline. I'm sure there will be plenty of questions afterwards; just

tell Mum to plead Unbreakable Vow and it'll keep people from getting too pushy. Any questions?"

Shaking her head, Narcissa gestured for Harry to step in front of her. "Stun them and then fall backwards. I'll cast the spell as I catch you."

"Makes sense. Alright then. Stupefy!" Forcibly overpowering the spell, Harry sent a thick bolt of blazing red light racing across the lawn, hitting the troll that had come closest to his friends and knocking it over sideways. It didn't get back up. A bit more confident now that he'd successfully stunned one - Harry had taken out plenty of trolls during the war, but generally through darker spells that he couldn't risk using at the moment - he gathered his power and let loose two more blasts in quick succession. "Stupefy! Stupefy!"

As the second and third trolls hit the ground with earthshaking thuds, Harry stumbled back or two out of not entirely feigned exhaustion; he'd released far larger bursts of magic with each stunner than was probably advisable, wanting to make sure he would put the troll down until the professors and aurors returned. Tipping backwards according to plan, he felt hands on his back and found himself staring up at Narcissa as she lowered him to the ground. "You're a little scary sometimes, you know that? Brilliant... but scary."

Harry just chuckled. "I try. Well, time for my nap?"

"Oh sure, leave us to clean up your mess." The tip of Narcissa's wand came to press against a spot on the back of his neck. "Remove potentia."

Harry's world swam and then faded to black.

Tucking one of her red braids back behind her ear, Hermione watched as her friend was carried towards the castle on a stretcher supported by his mother and the mysterious Lady Malfoy. What the bloody hell had just happened? Well, she knew the logical answer to that question: Harry had somehow managed to defeat the three trolls attacking the Samhuinn festivities before passing out from the strain. But that one logical answer only raised a host of other questions.

How in the world had Harry managed to stun even one troll, much less three? Hermione had talked her parents into buying a copy of

Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them when they'd visited Diagon Alley and read it over the summer before leaving it at home for them to peruse. She knew how hard trolls were to stun for entire groups of adult wizards. Harry had done it on his own, at eleven, and had done it not once but three times.

Furthermore, for some reason, people listened to Harry when he shouted orders. Not just her, but the rest of their friends, and even his own mother and Lady Malfoy. As he'd put it to her, he'd had a plan and she hadn't... but what kind of eleven-year-old boy could create and execute a plan to deal with a trio of mountain trolls in a matter of seconds? Especially when most everyone else was screaming and running for safety?

And what exactly were the dynamics between the Potter and Malfoy families? According to Daphne, Harry and Tara were related through his father and her mother, albeit distantly, while tonight... Lord Potter had seemed to barely tolerate the presence of his cousin, while Lady Potter and Lady Malfoy were apparently good friends. Lord Malfoy seemed to hate everyone but his wife, but that fit well enough with what she'd heard from... well, everyone. But how had two women who were so very different struck up a friendship, especially in the face of husbands who loathed each other?

A tap on her shoulder made her look back at where her father was staring at the still trolls with awe. "Is that the sort of thing that normally happens here at Hogwarts? Because if it is..." Hermione held her breath. Their second visit to the magical world and they'd been exposed to a random attack brought to an end by an insanely powerful boy her own age. They weren't going to pull her out, were they? "...we're definitely going to have to talk to your headmaster about making a donation. That was like something out of Lord of the Rings. 'You shall not pass!' and all that rot. To have my daughter someday able to do the same thing... that would be amazing!" Her father chuckled and rubbed his hands together. "Too bad we're not allowed to tell people about this. Wonder what Jeff would say if I told him my daughter knew magic. His little cricket-playing ponce of a son wouldn't sound so special anymore, would he?"

God, her parents were so embarrassing sometimes...

Eyeing her robes with disgust, Daphne waved her wand and muttered a few domestic charms to remove the stains, dry, and

press them before turning and doing the same for Tracey. Ugh. Thank Merlin she'd actually taken the time to learn a few things that time their house elf got food poisoning from snitching raw shrimp, or else she'd be walking around looking like a slob until she could fetch new robes from the tower.

That had been a rather... interesting... display. Daphne looked around, finally spotting her mother's blonde hair amongst the returning crowd as she and her father made their way back over towards her, 'Aunt' Claudia trailing behind them. Daphne simply narrowed her eyes at her parents; they'd pulled her upright and tried to drag her off with them, only to leave her behind to save themselves when she'd stumbled and fell.

When the trio finally reached where she and Tracey were standing, her stepmother hauled Tracey into a hug before leading her away to talk to her, leaving Daphne with her mother and a father who didn't seem to know which woman - and daughter - he was supposed to be dealing with first. Finally, after a tense moment, he let out a sigh and drooped. "I'm going to be buying you two a lot of clothes and jewelry to make up for this, aren't I?"

Daphne nodded.

"Although to be fair, it's not like either of you was actually hurt..."

Daphne just glared.

With no parents present to either comfort her or require comforting - not that she desired the former or wanted to be stuck doing the latter - Su was free to wander over and investigate the three stunned trolls as her friends reunited with their families. And stunned they were. Daintily poking one in the forehead with the tip of her shoe, Su quirked an eyebrow as it didn't even twitch. They weren't just down, they were well and truly out of it.

Wicked.

It was just one more mystery to add to the enigma that was Harry Potter. He had a rough, albeit conversational grasp of Mandarin - and she really did need to corner him one of these days to see exactly how fluent he actually was - was too mature for his age, and was far too powerful for an eleven-year-old boy. But given he could

use a wand - and she'd seen him both in the sunlight and in Quirrell's garlic-packed classroom - he couldn't be a vampire whose age exceeded his appearance, and if he was some sort of pretender hiding out in the form of Harry Potter, she reckoned that his parents would have figured it out by now and exposed him. And even then... most adults couldn't claim to have the power that Harry had displayed that night. The ones who did tended to hold prestigious positions in the wizarding world. Dumbledore for instance. Why would one be hiding as the eleven-year-old son of an auror captain and his wife?

Maybe it was time to reevaluate her attitude when it came to dealing with one Harry Potter. For the last two months, she'd generally been foisted off on Hermione while he paired with Daphne or Tara. And while Su quite enjoyed the muggleborn's presence and the intellectual stimulation of a partner on the same level as her, it also meant she was missing out on a chance to get to know Harry better... and that just wouldn't do.

"You should be down with the rest of your housemates, Altaira, not spending time with... him. I fear that your tendency to spend time with the wrong sort might lead to no end of troubles for you amongst your fellow Slytherins."

Looking up from where her cousin and friend lay motionless on a hospital wing bed, Tara frowned at her father. "I'm a Malfoy, Father. Oderint dum metuant." She'd always thought it ironic that a family as obsessed with blood purity as her father's would have taken its motto from one of muggle Rome's emperors. It certainly fit, though. 'Let them hate, so long as they fear'. "Besides, I would think he's the right sort, at least compared to the rest of the family I have. Or have you changed your mind about Death Eaters?"

Her father scowled, grip on the handle of his cane tightening. "I am not nor have I ever been affiliated with that organization, Altaira, and you know it. The Wizengamot cleared me of all charges after it was discovered that I was under..."

"Yes, yes, under the Imperius Curse, I know. And Aunt Bellatrix is a sane and productive member of society. To borrow a phrase I heard one of my cruder housemates use... pull the other one, Father." Her father snarled, his hand twisting before pulling up to reveal the wand he had concealed in his cane and Tara's eyes flicked over to where

a number of adults were conversing with Madam Pomfrey. A number of adults that included not only her mother, but two aurors and the headmaster. Following her gaze, her father slowly slid the wand back into its hiding spot. "Perhaps you'd like to join them?"

After one last, long look, Lucius Malfoy nodded and turned away. "Very well. But this discussion is far from over, my daughter."

Tara watched her father move to join the other adults, leaning on his cane as he affected the limp he always used in public. Once she was sure he was occupied, she let out a long, shuddering sigh of relief and reached up to run a hand through her hair. Oh, she was going to pay for that one over Christmas hols...

"Now, I think we all know why we're here..."

Narcissa Malfoy looked around slowly, taking in the fairly large crowd that was occupying the headmaster's office now that Madam Pomfrey had ejected them from her domain. Dumbledore himself was there of course, as were all four heads of house, her husband, the Potters, the Longbottoms, and Amelia Bones. Glancing to her left, Narcissa took strength from the fact that Lily was present; at least they'd be able to back each other up, rather than praying they came up with the same lies under separate questioning. Finally, after a minute in which nobody answered, Narcissa decided to break the ice. "I dare say it's not to sample your lemon drops, Headmaster."

Letting out a chuckle, Dumbledore pulled out a tin of the candies in question and offered them to Narcissa before taking one for himself. "Now that we've taken care of that... perhaps the two of you can inform the rest of us of what transpired while we were inside the school this evening looking for the troll that evidently did not exist?"

The two women exchanged looks and then Lily decided to take up the onus of explaining her son's actions. Sort of. "We'll tell you what we can, of course, but there are secrets here that aren't ours to share." Dumbledore opened his mouth to protest, and Lily shook her head. "Let me rephrase that. Secrets here that we can't share. A number of Unbreakable Vows have been taken between several parties and without everyone here and able to consent, who we're allowed to talk to can't be changed. I can't even tell you who I've sworn Vows to thanks to one of them." A bald-faced lie, Narcissa

mused, but not something anyone was going to challenge. Especially given she and Lily were the wives of two notable pureblood lords, albeit ones noteworthy for completely different reasons.

"Very well." Steepling his fingers under his chin, Dumbledore's gaze slowly shifted from Lily to Narcissa and back. A tendril of magic slid over her outermost barriers and Narcissa stiffened almost imperceptibly, reinforcing the occlumency barriers that had served her well through endless auror interrogations about her husband's activities and years of living with Lucius himself. She knew Lily was just as skilled as her in the mental arts and hoped her lover would have the good sense to bring her shields up, keep from making prolonged eye contact, or both. "Then I suppose it's less a matter of what happened and more a matter of what portions of what happened are you able to tell us about without violating the vows you have taken."

Lily nodded slowly at the headmaster's words. "What I can tell you is that Harry's wand is definitely unique among those used by your students right now. Legal, of course, but unique. It took Ollivander a long time to find him a match and he had to resort to some of his experiments before one finally took a shine to my son. Tonight was similar to something that happened when he first held his wand, but since there hadn't been a repeat since, we thought it was a one time problem."

When James turned to stare at Lily, an irritated expression on his face, Narcissa wanted to groan in frustration. Leave it to that self-centered man to create new problems when everyone else was trying to solve existing ones. "'We'? 'We' thought? Who's this 'we'? Because I sure as hell didn't know about any of this."

"Maybe if you were home, you would know what was going on with your children. Hell, James, even when I do tell you, you brush me off."

"Well I'm sorry, Lily. I'm sorry that when I come home from a hard day of work, earning the money that pays our bills, I'm not quite in the mood to deal with our kids' misbehavior. Isn't that your excuse for staying out of the workforce, come to think of it? Staying home to raise our children?"

"You're the head of a ridiculously wealthy family, James! Why do you even need to earn money? The Potters from now until Harry's grandkids could live comfortably off the money sitting in the Potter vaults."

"If that's the kind of husband you want, maybe you should have married Lucius bloody Malfoy!"

"At this point, I'm starting to think that maybe I should have!"

"Ahem. I have absolutely no interest in Lady Potter." All attention came to rest on Lucius and he shrugged before waving dismissively at Lily. "I just thought I'd make my thoughts on the subject known."

Lily leaned on the arm of Narcissa's chair, smirking as Lucius shrank away from her. "Are you sure, Lord Malfoy? Narcissa and I were joking about marrying your daughter to my son and I seem to remember her mentioning that unless you produced a son, your cousin in France would get everything when you died. And out of the two of us, I do have the better track record when it comes to producing sons. No offense, Cissy."

Shrugging, Narcissa offered her lover a faint smile. The only reason she enjoyed Potter Manor was because of the people it contained. It wasn't like she'd have a problem if the redhead took up residence at Malfoy Manor with her. Quite the opposite, actually. "None taken, I assure you."

Sprawled out half atop Narcissa, Lily pressed herself against the taller woman's side as she let her fingers trace over her lover's ribs. "So... I did one hell of a job tonight, didn't I? James gave me that opening, I took it, and suddenly that office couldn't empty out fast enough. Harry might have to deal with them when he wakes up but hey, it was his brilliant plan. Serves him right." Narcissa chuckled softly at that and Lily moved to straddle the taller woman, staring down into her eyes as she brought one fingertip up to trace the partially healed bruise that marred the left side of Narcissa's jaw. "I saw this earlier but then you managed to distract me. What happened?"

Narcissa turned her head so she could press a kiss to the tip of Lily's finger. "Evidently he and Tara had a little chat in the hospital wing about her spending time around your son. She told him off. He

wasn't happy that I'd raised such a 'willful and disobedient little brat'; I made the mistake of saying that she was always a perfect angel for me and that perhaps her lack of respect had something to do with his absence in her life." Frowning, she worked her jaw a few times. "He was not amused."

"And you saw James tonight." Lily shook her head. It wasn't the man she'd married but it was someone she was familiar with: she'd dealt with the arrogant little bastard for the first five years of her schooling. James Potter had grown up and that's why she'd chosen to start a family with him... and now he was reverting. And she wasn't going to tolerate it. "You know, a record number of girls bought my charm for their uniforms this fall and I have a few new things I was going to sell Madam Malkin. I could probably support us until we can find jobs or our investments start paying off."

Reaching up, Narcissa slowly ran her fingers through Lily's lengthening red hair. "Which reminds me... tell me again why I had the goblins invest in fruit?"

Lily furrowed her brow. Fruit? Oh! "You mean Apple? It's a company that makes muggle electronics. I wasn't too sure about it either because they're not doing too well, but I forgot our source of advice isn't a normal financial adviser. He's a time traveler. Evidently between now and when he came back, the company goes huge. Some music device that takes the world by storm."

"...since asking for details will just get me a bunch of information I don't understand, I'll just leave it at that I guess. Makes a bit more sense, though." Narcissa looked around before waving at the crumpled red robe thrown over the table in front of Lily's vanity. "Speaking of making sense... I can understand how it was easy for me to sneak out tonight. After his outburst, Lucius decided to have a few and then floo off to Merlin knows where. If he asks, I can say I was out getting healed by a friend so I didn't have to visit St. Mungo's and answer awkward questions. But... well, I was surprised to get your summons. Where's James? Work yet again?"

Shaking her head, Lily traced the gold pendant resting against Narcissa's breastbone: an intertwined lily and daffodil. Using the Protean Charm to link it to the identical necklace she wore, Lily had created a method for them to communicate with each other that so far neither of their husbands had noticed. "He knew he was destined

for the sofa and left without a fight. I'm guessing he's at either Sirius's or the Leaky Cauldron since the wards around our cottage at Godric's Hollow never flared."

"His loss is my gain."

"And mine."

Joe's Note: Before I get any protests from people... straight from Quidditch Through the Ages, the fifth rule of quidditch as established in 1750: "No substitution of players is allowed throughout the game, even if a player is too injured or tired to continue to play, unless there are reserve players present." And for direct canon evidence - if you don't accept the two side books Rowling wrote for fundraisers as canon - it clearly states in the first book that Alicia Spinnet was a reserve player the year before Harry's arrival to Hogwarts, meaning that the house teams at least occasionally field and utilize reserve players. So what I've done here with Hermione isn't without precedent, nor does it violate canon. Also, had a nice person mail me regarding Hermione's pads and found out that I'd misinterpreted what I'd been seeing on a couple of sports equipment websites. So I've tweaked this chapter accordingly.

The morning after Samhuinn, Narcissa's hex finally wore off and Harry struggled back to consciousness. Now that he had more time to think about it, he wondered if perhaps he should have recommended a different spell for her to use, as opposed to one that turned the victim's own magical power against them. Because if there was one thing he had in spades, it was magical power...

After letting Madam Pomfrey fuss over him until she was certain he was healthy and there would be no repercussions to his bout of 'magical exhaustion' the night before, Harry made a beeline for Gryffindor Tower, slipping past a group of adults headed for - he assumed - the hospital wing and a chance to interrogate him on the events of the previous evening. After all, at least if things had gone according to plan, they would have gotten nothing out of Lily and Narcissa due the nebulous threat of Unbreakable Vows restraining them and if there was one thing Harry knew Dumbledore hated, it was being left in the dark.

Well, he didn't seem to mind leaving others in the dark but God forbid someone do it to him...

Harry found himself whistling merrily as he reached the seventh floor landing and circled around towards Gryffindor Tower. Oh, he was sure there would be some sort of reckoning after his show last night but for now... Quirrell's attack had been foiled and he'd never even had a chance to move on the stone. It might also make him think twice before making another run at it, given the unknown he'd been

presented with in Harry. Reaching the Fat Lady, Harry coughed quietly to get her attention. "Victory."

"From what I've heard, you had a great one last evening, young Mister Potter. Go right in. Your friends are waiting for you... still. Or perhaps 'again' is more accurate?" The Fat Lady chuckled as she swung open. "I haven't seen such a tightly knit group of first years since your father and his friends back in 1981..."

Raising an eyebrow at the comparison between him and his friends and the Marauders, Harry tapped his wand against the top of his head and disillusioned himself before slipping through the portrait hole. It made sense, he reasoned; he had no clue who was lingering in the common room and while he did want to see his friends, he had no desire to get bogged down talking to a crowd of false friends who now wanted to pay attention to him only because he'd done something noteworthy. It was easy to spot where Hermione, Daphne, Su, Tracey, and - amazingly enough - a black-haired Tara sitting on a trio of two-seaters that had been tugged into a triangle and, curiosity piqued, Harry slowly circled around the common room to see what the quietly chattering quintet was up to.

"...so, we're in agreement then that Harry may be smart and powerful but he's got the common sense of a cabbage, and that it's up to us to make sure he doesn't kill himself with some stupid macho stunt?" Hermione looked at each girl in turn, waiting for them to nod before moving on. There were no dissenters. "Good. And so, with that in mind, I hereby call the first meeting of Harry's Angels to order."

Harry bit his lip to keep from laughing. Well, it was better than SPEW, he supposed. Moving to stand behind Tara, he canceled the charm hiding him from view and leaned over the back of the two-seater, ruffling her hair. "Good morning, Angels. And Tara, good work with the Color-Changing Charm. Add a bit of curl and you'll be the spitting image of your mother."

There was a brief pause and then all five girls were up and launching themselves at him. "Harry!"

"Ack! Air!"

Following his rather one-sided encounter with the three trolls, Harry noticed everyone looking at him differently. It was to be expected, really; a single troll would have caused most adult wizards significant difficulty and he'd taken out three as a first year. The excuse they'd come up with to explain away the incident hadn't helped the stares any: not only was he a first year who could take out trolls, but it was because he had some sort of special wand that caused his magic to fluctuate randomly. But Harry couldn't really bring himself to care about the odd treatment. Even as the majority of his peers pulled away, he and his 'Angels' grew closer. He'd even managed to convince them to get up and go running with him every morning.

Or rather they were taking their self-appointed duties far too seriously and refused to let him go out alone, even if it did mean getting up at five o'clock and going for a lap around the lake. Semantics.

Hermione and Su naturally had the easiest time of it: the former was still in great shape from playing field hockey while the latter happened to share the original Su's interest in tai chi. The others, though... Daphne and Tracey had a slight advantage due to the number of stairs they had to climb each day, but that only meant they were a tiny bit less red than Tara as they lagged behind the others.

At least they were all mostly appropriately dressed for their morning runs now. Harry snorted as he thought back to what some of the girls had worn for the first few days. Taking pity on them, he'd owed home with a list of measurements and color combinations - along with where he'd hidden the five satchels he'd ordered from Madam Malkin - and thanks to the combined efforts of Silver Star, Albiona, and a loaned Maau Tau Jing, he'd soon received five pairs of trainers and four velour tracksuits and the top from a fifth along with a matching skirt - specifically picked to match the other girls' pants while being baggy enough to not impede Tara's range of motion - and leggings. It was hard to tell which the girls had been happier about: the free workout clothes that included a range of charms to keep them comfortable at any time of year, the free trainers, or the bags Harry had used to deliver both. The bags had also been heavily charmed by the time they'd been delivered, including an Expansion Charm on the main compartment and the same charm Madam Malkin used on robes and uniforms on the exterior. Arriving

at Hogwarts black with the school's crest emblazoned prominently on the outside, each had shifted to adopt the appropriate house patch and piping in house colors when first touched by their new owner.

Well, he knew at least one of them was far fonder of her free bag than her free clothes...

"I swear to God, I'm a gold chain and a crooked cap away from being queen of the chavs. My parents would be horrified if they saw me like this." Hermione grunted as she decided to leap up and over a good sized rock instead of detouring around it, stumbling a bit on the landing due to the unstable ground before catching herself and returning to her complaining. "They'll probably disown me out of shame if they even find this stuff in my trunk. And if they do, it's all your fault and I'm coming to live with you and your family and they can pay to feed and clothe me and take care of my tuition and supplies for Hogwarts. Your mum seems nice, I'm sure she'll help out the nice muggleborn girl whose life her son ruined."

Harry just rolled his eyes at his friend's melodrama. "With how you were looking at the current mistress of Potter Manor at the Samhuinn festival, I think you're just looking for an excuse to move in."

Hermione was oddly silent after that.

She was also about as red as the loudly puffing Daphne.

Smirking, Tracey reached up and nudged the neckline of her blue t-shirt to one side so she could tug gently on the strap of her black bra. "Mmm. Evidently this year is being brought to us by the number thirty-six and the letter E."

Harry leaned over, burying his face in her neck to avoid laughing even as Hermione let out an outraged huff. "...you just violated one of my favorite childhood memories. Dirty Sesame Street jokes, Tracey? Are you fucking serious?"

"I believe Anastasiya Black would take exception if Tracey tried that. And so would Harry, for that matter." Laughing as Hermione

groaned at the deliberate misinterpretation of her question, Harry looked over to find the leader of his group's younger year standing in the compartment's doorway, a smirk tugging at her lips. Leave it to Luna to drive Hermione spare in any universe they ran across each other in. As the increasingly curvaceous blonde moved to sit at his left, curling up against his left side just like how Tracey was against his right, Harry glanced over at the Ravenclaw. He idly wondered if Luna would ever catch up with the exceptionally voluptuous half-blood, but personally found it unlikely. What were the odds of two girls in his little circle of friends both ending up that lucky? Although both Luna and Su were shaping up to be pretty damn lucky in their own right. Twirling a strand of long blonde hair around her finger, she smiled at Tracey before latching onto Harry's arm and kissing his cheek. "Hullo."

Harry squeezed Luna's leg, thumb running up and down over the red and gold candy cane tights she had opted to wear even without the rest of her uniform, before looking back over at the doorway. Doing his best to imitate her Scottish accent, he waved the waiting girl in. "Aw'right, Lara?"

"Oye, you really need to stop doing that, Harry. You sound ridiculous." Harry offered Lara a two-fingered salute for that comment, narrowly dodging her retaliatory kick as she entered the compartment. Giving Lara a quick look over, Harry raised an eyebrow at her newest attempt to deal with her piebaldism. Her trademark white streak was finally gone, split in half and framing her face, the left streak dyed purple and the right streak gold. He'd heard her muttering about laser surgery towards the end of last year and indeed, the lenses held in place by her purple plastic frames this year seemed thinner than the ones he'd seen her with previously, getting rid of the same bug-eyed look she'd previously shared with Trelawney. And Lara being Lara, the outfit wasn't complete without one of her seemingly endless supply of purple and gold Pride of Portree shirts. Lara took up a spot by Hermione's feet, the older girl bumping Lara's butt with one trainer. "Nighean na galla." Harry raised an eyebrow and waited for the catfight to break out, but evidently Hermione still hadn't picked up enough Scottish Gaelic from Lara yet to know what that meant. Which he supposed was for the best. "So? Where's our favorite Frog? And your albino shadow?"

Rolling his eyes at Lara's nickname for his cousin, Harry shrugged. "Not sure on either count. Tara's got her own friends in Slytherin and

so she could be sitting with them for once. There's a seat for her with us if she wants it, though. As for the Girl-Who-Defected... Hermione?" The brunette didn't respond, staring off into space off to Harry's left. "Earth to Hermione. Anybody home?"

Hermione finally gave a start and looked around the compartment before blushing. "Umm, she's nearby. So is Cassie." How did she... and what the hell had... oh. Veela allure. It was a magical field and - since it wasn't limited by line of sight - Hermione could sense the two girls. But between Anastasiya and Cassie, Harry had long ago become accustomed to the whispers of a veela's allure against his occlumency shields and learned to ignore the pull that affected almost all other boys... and Hermione. Straightening up, Hermione pulled a compact out of her satchel and began primping. "How do I look?"

"Good enough to eat, 'Ermione." Entering the compartment, a girl with long black hair didn't even bother to acknowledge them before moving to straddle Hermione's lap and kissing the muggleborn hard. Tara and Cassie filed in behind her, rolling their eyes at the display before teaming up to force Lara down the bench to sit beside the amorous couple and taking the seats between her and Su.

Harry just shook his head and sighed. "Good morning, Gabrielle. Nice to see you. How was your summer?"

Groaning, Harry rolled onto his side and used a quick burst of wandless magic to pull his notebook to him before conjuring a floating ball of Bluebell flames for light. A third vote for a Gryffindor Luna... the Slytherin version still led by a vast majority, though, so he wasn't going to put money on her ending up a lion anytime soon. Tracey had replaced Daphne again as the other object of his affections; uncommon but not the first time and so not particularly noteworthy. What really intrigued him, though, was the presence of a whole new player: Gabrielle Delacour, and one who was significantly older than the one in his world at that.

Considering he knew two girls who'd been boys in his universe and one boy who'd been a girl, the change in Gabrielle's age didn't even make him blink. On the other hand, it did raise some interesting questions. Was she the reason why Cassie was going to Beauxbatons instead of Hogwarts for her early years? To spend time in the company of a same-aged Veela so they could learn to

deal with their blossoming abilities from the older Fleur? And why, after all the dreams without her, was Gabrielle suddenly at Hogwarts in one of his dreams? Was she going to transfer alongside Cassie? Or had the Delacours just now made the decision to move to England between now and next September, putting both girls at Hogwarts from the start and causing all his future dreams to shift to reflect that?

Ugh. There had to be someone he could talk to about these damn dreams. The more of them he had, the more questions and uncertainties he was left with. Closing his notebook, he tossed it back onto his nightstand and extinguished the floating ball of flames before rolling over and going back to sleep.

Maybe if he was lucky, he'd have a nice, normal dirty dream about Reese.

As the day of his second first quidditch game dawned cold and clear, Harry tried to summon up some of the nervousness and apprehension he'd had the first time, but it was impossible. This year's Slytherin team was dismal, relying entirely on brute force and causing enough injuries to allow their mediocre players to secure a win. He'd beaten them once already and with far less talent than he had now. This was going to be a cakewalk for him.

That, and he was really looking forward to seeing their secret weapon deployed against the elitist bastards.

Settling in for breakfast that morning with the rest of the quidditch team, Harry and Hermione exchanged little smiles as she plunked herself down next to Katie Bell, Su at her side as always and Daphne at his. To anyone else, it would appear as if Harry's friends had merely migrated to join him as he sat with the quidditch team. If they only knew that Gryffindor now had an eighth man ready to take the field...

Way down the table where the rest of the first years were sitting, Harry could see Neville glaring at him. He just smirked and gave a cheerful wave before getting to work on his breakfast. After all, Merlin only knew how long the game might go and he didn't want to get hungry. But Neville... oh, that was a fun one. Ever since Samhuinn, the fat little bastard had been alternating between kissing his ass and cursing at him for not being friends. With anyone else,

Harry would have recommended a St. Mungo's evaluation for some sort of multiple personality problem. In this case... it was pretty much just Neville being Neville as far as he could tell. Spoiled children didn't react well to the real world. Draco had been proof enough of that the first time around.

Speaking of Draco, Harry found it odd that he hadn't had more encounters with Mimas Carrow in this universe. Apart from a few sneers here and there, the two of them had essentially ignored each other between the Remembrall incident and Samhuinn. But since then, the boy had taken to eyeing him uncertainly; perhaps he was evaluating the feasibility of making an attempt at friendship under the whole 'enemy of my enemy' principle? Harry snorted. He'd go for that the day Snape wore a color. But hey, if the boy wanted to sit there staring at him... as long as the little shit wasn't actually coming over to bother him, Harry didn't care what Carrow did.

Finally, game time came and Harry helped sneak Hermione into the changing rooms. Somehow she'd managed to escape notice so far, perhaps because everyone was focused on him being the youngest seeker in a century, and they didn't want to blow the surprise now. Even as the team lined up to take the field, Hermione was left behind to wait for the moment she was needed. "She's all set, right?" Wood looked nervous, idly tracing chaser formations in the air with his fingers. "I mean, I hope we don't need her and all but..."

"Just keep your head in the game, Wood, and we won't have a need for her." Harry looked back and gave Hermione an apologetic smile before returning his gaze to the team's starting keeper. "After all, she only goes in if you get taken out. So as long as you avoid getting killed or something, you don't need to worry about how ready she is or isn't."

Wood nodded absently. "Right. Right." There were a series of increasingly loud cheers as Lee Jordan announced their names and Wood hoisted his broom up onto his shoulder. "Here we go. Good luck, all of you."

As they emerged onto the pitch, Harry looked around. Sadly, the 'Potter for Minister' banner from last time around was missing, but the new additions to the staff's box made it worth it. His parents were there, along with Sirius and Anastasiya, his sisters, and Cassie. Narcissa was there, albeit with Lucius and therefore limited to a

simple nod and smile when he spotted her in the crowd. Sirius and James had even apparated out to retrieve Hermione's parents that morning, who seemed a bit confused at their inability to locate their daughter but nonetheless enthused.

Just like in all but one of the quidditch games he'd played in so far, Madam Hooch was waiting for them in the middle of the field as the two teams assembled. Her yellow eyes drifted over each of the players before focusing on Marcus Flint. "Now I want a nice fair game, all of you." Harry snorted derisively at that; as if the Slytherin team even knew the meaning of the word. Hooch eyed him for a moment before stepping back toward the ball crate. "Players, mount your brooms."

Hopping onto his Nimbus 2000, Harry hovered a few feet above the grass, twisting back and forth slowly. It still felt odd to be using this instead of his Firebolt, but sometimes one just had to work with what they were given. Besides, they'd hit the market in two years and he could be back on the familiar broom then. Terence Higgs glared his way and Harry responded by taking a page out of Hermione's book, offering up a two-fingered salute. The pureblood merely looked confused and Harry smirked. Ignorant bastards. Then Hooch's whistle sounded and they were up and off into the air as she hurled the quaffle skyward.

"And the quaffle is taken immediately by Angelina Johnson of Gryffindor... excellent chaser that girl is, and rather attractive to boot..."

"Jordan!"

"Sorry, Professor."

Harry chuckled as he drifted lazily over the pitch, watching the quaffle fly back and forth. While Luna's commentary had been hilarious to listen to, there was just something about Lee that nobody could replace and he was glad to have the familiar face back in the position. Idly, he wondered what had changed in the year before his arrival at Hogwarts, that the twins had come to befriend then-first year Olivia Waters and turn her into their partner in crime instead of Lee, but that was neither here nor there. Maybe after he nabbed the snitch and everyone was fawning over him in the

common room, he could corner her and convince her to give up her story...

"And she's really belting along up there, makes a neat pass to Alicia Spinnet... a good find of Oliver Wood's, last year only a reserve... back to Johnson and... no, the Slytherins have taken the quaffle! Slytherin Captain Marcus Flint gains the quaffle and off he goes! Flint flying like an eagle up there... he's going to sc... no, stopped by an excellent move by Gryffindor keeper Wood! And the Gryffindors take the quaffle. That's chaser Katie Bell of Gryffindor there, nice dive around Flint, off up the field and... ouch! That must have hurt, hit in the shoulder by a bludger. Quaffle taken by the Slytherins... that's Adrian Pucey speeding off toward the goals, but he's blocked by a bludger, sent his way by Fred or George Weasley, can't tell which... nice play by the Gryffindor beater at any rate. And Johnson back in possession of the quaffle, a clear field ahead and off she goes... she's really flying... dodges a speeding bludger... the goal posts are ahead... come on now Angelina... keeper Bletchley dives... misses... Gryffindor scores!"

Cutting across the field, Harry held out his hand to high five Johnson for her excellent shot before pushing the broom back to top speed as he made a quick circuit of the pitch in search of his prey. Nothing. Not even Fred's wristwatch or something gold in the stands. Hopefully the snitch would make an appearance soon, or he'd be in for a long and boring afternoon...

"Slytherin in possession... Pucey ducks two bludgers as he heads for the goals... wait, here come beaters Derrick and Bole..." Harry cursed loudly as the Slytherin beaters slid into position to intercept the bludgers the Weasley twins had just batted at Pucey, sending them flying back at their opponents. Or in this case, a singular opponent: Wood. "Wood dodges the first bludger and oh! The second one hits him in the head! Just like his first game a few years ago, keeper Wood has taken a bludger to the skull and appears to be unconscious! And time has been called."

Harry hurtled over to the Gryffindor goal posts, spiraling down towards the ground to land near where Hooch and Pomfrey were looking over the injured keeper. "He's going to be out for a while. Yet another dose of Skele-Grow for that boy, all because of this foolish game. When will you lot learn?" Waving her wand, Pomfrey conjured

a stretcher under Wood and lifted it into the air, making her way off the pitch.

As the other players touched down behind Harry, Hooch turned her attention their way. "You have no keeper. Also, Wood is your captain and so without him, you cannot end the game by mutual captain consent. Will you play on or forfeit now, Gryffindor?"

"We'll take the entirety of our time out, if you don't mind? We have a reserve keeper we can field for the rest of the game." Hooch gave Harry an odd look, turning to the rest of the team for confirmation. When she received nods all around, she nodded her assent before heading back to the middle of the field and waving the Slytherin team down to the ground. Harry turned to his teammates. "Alright, go form up. I'll be back in a minute."

The other four turned to leave but Johnson held a hand up, stopping them as she stared at Harry. "Who died and left you assistant captain? You're the youngest one here. Why do you get to order the rest of us around?"

Harry just shrugged, ticking points off on his fingers. "Simple. My friend, my idea, we all know you're scared of me after Samhuinn, and most of all... because I just did. Now do you want me to go get Hermione so we can play on or should we forfeit?" He held Johnson's gaze for a moment before she looked away, leading the others off toward Hooch and the Slytherins. "Thought so." Shaking his head, Harry entered the changing room to find Hermione sitting on a bench, adjusting her leg guards. Her hair was already twisted into a braid to make it easier for her to don her helmet. "You ready?"

Snorting, Hermione grabbed the helmet waiting next to her on the bench in one hand and her broom in the other. "Not really. But seeing as how Wood just got himself concussed again... and may I just say that can't be good for his chances at passing the OWLs and NEWTs? No Wood means either I go in or you guys allow the Slytherins free reign of the goals, and I'd hate to have to face the Weasley twins if it was my fault that happened."

"True enough. Come on, then. No time like the present." Harry gestured to the door and Hermione managed a small smile before leading the way out onto the field. As they made their way over to where the rest of the players were waiting, silence slowly descended

on the field. By the time they reached Madam Hooch, Harry could have heard a niffler fart. He grinned. Perfect.

Flint was the first to find his voice, staring at Hermione in horrified disbelief. "What the bloody fuck?"

That seemed to shake Hooch from her stupor and she shot the Slytherin captain a glare. "Flint! Language!" Turning her gaze to Hermione again, the hard look melted away into utter bafflement again. "Although I have to echo Flint's sentiment, if not in those exact words. What are you wearing, Granger?"

"Pads." Harry snorted in amusement at Hermione's blunt and simple answer. "The international standard rules permit the players to wear one pad on each shin, one pad on each forearm, and a helmet if desired." Hermione tapped her leg guards and blockers for emphasis, drawing attention to the oversized red pads. Each one was Gryffindor red with a golden lion and trim, made of dragonhide over muggle foam padding. They were bigger than the versions she'd shown off that first practice, ordered from an ice hockey supply store specifically for the project so she wouldn't have to sacrifice her field hockey gear for the sake of the experiment. She'd opted for two blockers instead of a blocker and a glove as he'd predicted, but since the quaffle was too big to try and nab with it, that was no loss according to her. They too were red with the golden lion across the piece shielding her arm from harm. Hefting her helmet, Hermione slid it on and stared out at them from between the painted, roaring jaws of a lioness. "Unlike the rest of the wizarding world, I'm familiar with the phrase 'think outside the box'. The rules don't regulate the size of a player's pads and there's no required materials list, just a list of banned materials, none of which are present in my pads. So as much fun as being hit with a bludger and getting my skull cracked or a limb broken sounds in theory, I believe I'll be proceeding with my plan to remind you lot that we're in the twenty-first century now."

Turning to the staff box, Hooch raised her wand to her temple and fired off a silvery owl that shot across the pitch and up to where the headmaster was sitting. When it reached him, his eyes went wide and he shrugged helplessly before firing a return spell back down to their referee that circled twice before diving into her head. She eyed Hermione for a moment before sighing. "Dumbledore says the reasoning is sound and the game won't be delayed to appeal to the

Department of Magical Games and Sports. Players, mount your brooms."

Flint glared and crossed his arms over his chest. "If she gets to wear that muggle shit, Bletchley gets to wear better pads too!"

Arching one white brow, Hooch eyed the Slytherin keeper. "Do you have something in the equipment shed that he's not already wearing?" The team exchanged looks before Flint shook his head. "Then mount your brooms or you can use up a time out to sit here and keep wasting our time."

"Fucking mudblood trash, polluting our game with her muggle sports shit." Flint threw one leg over his broom and pushed off the ground, hovering a foot or two above the grass. "When we get done with you, you're going to think Wood had it easy."

Hermione paused before dropping her broom, heading for the captain of the Slytherins. "Come down here and say that to my face, you snaggle-toothed bastard. I will fuck your inbred arse the hell up." Sweet Merlin, Hermione had a mouth on her. And he thought he'd heard the worst of it when he charmed those streaks into her hair...

Grinning widely and exposing his horribly troll-like teeth, Flint twisted his broom in a quick circle and forcing Hermione to duck to avoid being clipped in the head with his bristles. "Awful lot of bark for such a little bitch, mudblood..."

"Granger, Flint! Language! Granger, get on your broom or get off the field!" Walking over, Harry grabbed the back of Hermione's robes and tugged her back over to her broom before mounting his own. He was eagerly awaiting the impending carnage after that exchange and knew things wouldn't take long to explode. He was proven right almost immediately. As soon as all fourteen players were airborne, Madame Hooch blew into her whistle to resume play... and Hermione rocketed forward on her brand new Nimbus 2001, her right arm shooting out and clotheslining Flint. The Slytherin chaser let out a choked gurgle as his broom continued on without him, sending him sliding off the back end and dropping a few feet to the grass. "Blatching, Gryffindor! Penalty shot to Slytherin!"

"Sweet Merlin, before the players even make it into the air, new Gryffindor keeper Hermione Granger makes her mark on the game

and sends that troll Flint back to the ground! Gryffindor is charged with a penalty, but it's completely worth it in my opinion. Go Granger!"

"Jordan!"

Making a slow, lazy loop along the edge of the pitch, Hermione pumped her fist in the air a few time and basked in the cheers of her fellow Gryffindors before taking up her position in front of the rings. After a few moments of angry discussion, Flint wrestled the quaffle away from the other two chasers on his team and rose into position to take the team's penalty shot. Without any help from his teammates or interference from bludgers, though, Hermione kept up with him easily and caught the quaffle, hurling it to Johnson before making an obscene gesture at Flint.

Harry was tempted to shout a warning as Flint made a beeline for one of his own beaters, wrestling the bat away, but Hermione had an eye trained on him even as she kept the rest of her attention on the quaffle. "What's this? Evidently Flint's not content at just failing as a captain and chaser today and wants to try his hand at beating..."

"Jordan!"

"And here comes the bludger... Flint whacks it toward the Gryffindor keeper but Granger seems strangely unconcerned... she's raising one arm and oh! Direct hit!" There was silence until Hermione offered Flint a wave followed up by another two-fingered salute. "Sweet Merlin, whatever that girl is wearing, she just took a full on bludger hit and doesn't have a scratch to show for it! It may look ugly as sin, but it gets the job done!"

There was a moment of silent and then what sounded distinctly like a slap being magnified by the pitch's magical speaker system. Then Harry groaned as his mother's voice emerged. "Excuse me, young man, but I helped do the sewing and charms work on those pads. They aren't 'ugly as sin', thank you very much."

Jordan, much to Harry's surprise, found at least one person scary enough to induce an apology. "Oops. Sorry, Lady Potter."

Shaking his head, Harry shot off towards where Bell was chasing a Slytherin chaser back down the pitch. Just before he took the shot, she slapped the quaffle away and dove to retrieve it. Harry followed, running along side her before pulling ahead and sliding in front. "Hey, Bell, my broom's faster! It's not blagging if it's your teammate!"

"I hope you know what you're doing, Potter!" Harry grabbed the broom with both hands, hanging on tight as it bucked beneath him, slowing noticeably as his teammate latched on. "Go go go!"

Catching Spinnet and Johnson's attention, Harry wracked his brain before coming up with the signal he'd seen them use in practice and doing his best to mimic it. Evidently he managed it, or close enough, because they fell into position beside him as he accelerated down the field, creating an odd augmented Hawkshead Attacking Formation. While he suffered from the weight of an entire second rider being dragged behind him, it was still faster than Bell could manage on her own and Bletchley was caught off guard as Harry tipped his broom upward, shooting up into the sky as she released him and rocketed beneath, drawing back her arm and hurling the quaffle toward the left ring. It passed through and a tone sounded, signaling another ten points for Gryffindor.

"And Potter taking after his old man..."

"Who the hell are you calling old, whelp?"

"James Potter!"

"Sorry, Professor."

"...getting in on some wicked chaser action there, helping Gryffindor rack up another ten points. Huh. In the middle of Gryffindor's three lovely chasers. You know, Potter, I had a dream like that once..."

"Jordan!"

"Moving on..." Harry chuckled and left the chasers to their own devices as he began looking for the snitch for the first time since the game resumed. After a minute or so, though, he realized Higgs was marking him... and that just wouldn't do. Leaning forward, Harry adopted a look of total concentration before diving. "And Potter's seen the snitch!"

Harry bit his lip to avoid smirking as Jordan fueled the exact reaction he'd been hoping for. Higgs gave up even attempting to be subtle - not that he'd been managing it in the least - and sped up, trying to follow as closely as possible so Harry would lead him to the snitch he couldn't yet see. Harry, feeling a bit playful, raced toward Spinnet from behind, coming within inches of her as he rocketed past. Hopefully Higgs wouldn't hit her, but if he did... blatching penalty on Slytherin and a penalty shot for Gryffindor.

Higgs managed to avoid the midair obstacle, though, and Harry decided to try something a bit more challenging. As he headed for the Gryffindor goal posts, Harry raised one arm and tapped it against his chest. Hermione nodded in understanding, leaning back and clenching her thighs around the broomstick as she prepared to do her part. Waiting until he was almost to Hermione, Harry slid a bit to his right and hauled back on the broomstick, hanging on for dear life as the sudden deceleration nearly threw him off. Higgs, left with either trying a hard turn, rise, or dive at top speed or threading the needle between the two, opted for the latter option. It proved to be a mistake when Harry and Hermione each thrust an arm out, hand wrapping around the other's wrist for support as the seeker slammed into them.

"Bloody hell! Higgs gets teamed up on by Granger and Potter, getting knocked off his broom and sent flying into the bottom of the center goal. I could hear his head hit that ring from here, folks; that boy isn't getting up anytime soon. No doubt there's going to be a penalty and a free shot for Slytherin, but again... good work Granger and Potter! They may be the newest members of the Gryffindor team but they're certainly going out of their way to make their presence felt!"

In short order Higgs was carted off the field to join Wood in the hospital wing, Flint failed to make another penalty shot, and regular play resumed. Hermione was starting to take more bludger shots than before, though, and so while Harry knew that technically Gryffindor could run the game out indefinitely and rack up an enormous score since only he could end the game, he decided catching the snitch soon would probably be a good idea. The padding would hold up to a great deal of abuse, but why risk the brightest mind of his generation for no good reason?

The game continued on for almost half an hour, the Slytherins scoring once in a while as the Gryffindors ran up a huge lead on their increasingly desperate foes, and the end was almost anticlimactic. Hovering near the Gryffindor goals as he watched Hermione use the quaffle to hit a Slytherin player in the back of the head, Harry almost missed the glint of gold that indicated the snitch. Almost, but not quite. Wheeling around, Harry flattened himself against the broom and took off like a shot, eager to land Gryffindor another hundred and fifty points and end the game.

The snitch drifted close to where Flint was hovering and Harry was momentarily worried the Slytherin chaser would blatch or a snitchnip just to be cruel, but after a long moment, Flint pulled back to give Harry room. Perhaps he wanted to end the humiliation? Whatever his reason, Harry was just glad he wouldn't have to wrestle the brute for the snitch. "Go for the mudblood!"

Well now. That didn't sound good. Intent on catching the snitch to end the game, though, Harry left Hermione to fend for herself, putting his broom into a steep dive as the snitch plummeted to earth, relying on Jordan's commentary to keep abreast of what was going on. "Derrick and Bole seem to have abandoned the game itself, leaving the bludgers to the Weasley twins as they head for the Gryffindor goals. Potter may be about to catch the snitch, but Flint seems to want to leave a lasting impression on the Gryffindor team by hospitalizing two keepers in one game. I have no idea what Granger's plan is, because she's not making a run for it. Instead, she's pulling the broom upright and if I didn't know any better..."

Harry leaned forward, thrusting his hand out. Three inches away... two inches... one... his fingers curled around the snitch and he pulled up, pumping his hand in the air. "Got it!"

"...it is! Granger pulls off a Starfish and Stick but instead of blocking the quaffle, she plants her foot straight into the chest of Derrick! For the third time today, Granger has knocked a Slytherin from the sky and it's not even a penalty because Potter had already nabbed the snitch! A hundred and fifty points for Gryffindor and they win, three hundred and twenty to forty!"

Landing, Harry found himself attacked from all sides as Su, Daphne, Tracey, and Tara latched onto him, delivering rib-cracking hugs before pulling away: Su to do the same to Hermione and the

remaining three ladies to scuffle briefly amongst themselves before two winners emerged and Daphne and Tracey took his arms in their own. "Amazing game, Harry. Although I could have done without that one move you did with Hermione. Both of you could have been thrown from your brooms, and where would Gryffindor have been then?"

Harry chuckled and gave Daphne's arm a squeeze as he ambled over to Hermione and Su. "Hermione and I ran through it in practice dozens of times. Wood and the twins charmed a school broom with a dummy to fly into us. We tested it with someone up to Flint's weight. What'd we end up calling it, Hermione? The 'Murderous Muggleborn'? Oh wait, that's what you did to Flint..."

"Hey, why don't we head back up to the castle and play a rousing game of 'Hide and Go Fuck Yourself', Harry?" Hermione thrust her broom out like a lance, jabbing Harry in the chest and sending him stumbling back into Tara. "Besides, we agreed. It's the 'Mad Muggleborn', in both the solo and team-up versions."

Before Harry could respond, Hermione was rocked forward by a slap to the back of her head. Behind her was a tall, middle-aged woman with Hermione's trademark wild brown hair. "Language, damn it. We raised you better than that."

From beside his wife, Mister Granger opened his mouth to comment, closed it, and then shook his head. "I'd remark on the irony of that statement, dear, but it's not worth sleeping on the sofa when we get home." Taking Hermione by the shoulder to spin her around, he grabbed her in a bear hug and lifted her off the ground. "That's my girl! Glad to see you didn't take any rubbish from those boys on the field."

"Oof! Put me down! Dad, you're embarrassing me in front of... well, everyone!" Hermione batted helplessly at her father's arms for a moment before he chuckled and released her. She stumbled a bit before regaining her footing, glaring at him as she smoothed down her robes. "Bloody hell, I can't take you two anywhere." Harry couldn't help but laugh at her misfortune and soon her glare was turned on him. "Laugh it up, Harry. Don't look now, but I'm not the only one with parents here today..."

That was all the warning Harry received before being bowled over by a redheaded blur. "Oh my God, I was so worried about you! And what were you thinking, trying that move with Hermione? You could have gotten yourself killed!"

Hermione snickered.

Harry glared at her for a moment before sighing and tugging his arms away from Daphne and Tracey so he could reach up to pat Lily on the back as she clung to him.

Joe's Note: I quite emphatically stated in the author's note for the other story's version of this chapter that I had no intention of making it into a harem fic. That remains true this time around. Also, unlike most fics, Harry is human here. He looks at the girls around him. Unlike most authors out there, I realize that people do that simply for the sake of enjoying beauty. It doesn't mean he's going to date and/or marry all or even any of them. Christ, if I married every girl I took a long look at, I'd need a mansion just for the girls I met in freshman year of high school.

In the aftermath of the quidditch game, the school seemingly decided that he was just a normal young wizard - albeit one capable of casting phenomenally powerful spells when his life was threatened - and things largely returned to normal. The Angels still joined him for his morning runs and accompanied him most places, but had agreed to give him at least a bit of freedom... although they reserved the right to rescind that freedom if he did something stupid again.

November blew past in a flurry of classes, quidditch practices, study sessions, and raids on the kitchen. Soon it was December and snow was falling. Ravenclaw defeated Hufflepuff by a narrow margin, putting the teams second and third respectively in the standings for the Quidditch Cup. As Christmas approached, though, Harry realized he had absolutely no idea what was in the Forbidden Corridor this time around. He still maintained that whatever had injured Cherise couldn't be Fluffy, based on how fast she recovered. But if it wasn't the cerberus... what was it?

There was only one person at Hogwarts he knew he'd be able to get an answer from: Hagrid.

And so that's how Harry found himself battling through knee-high snow one afternoon to reach Hagrid's hut, scarf wrapped tight around his neck as he shivered in the fierce cold. As soon as he reached the front steps, he hammered on the door hard, desperate to get in. He made a mental note to brush up on his basic charms; he could cast any fire-based combat spell perfectly, up to and including Fiendfyre, but for some reason he couldn't come up with anything that would work for melting the snow to make tromping over the grounds easier. Well, he could think of spells that would melt the snow but he didn't fancy leaving long streaks of blackened earth to be discovered come spring. The door swung open and

Harry found himself looking far up into Hagrid's confused face. "Harry Potter? Blimey, I haven' seen yeh since... well, before yer mum an' dad went into hidin' near the end of the last war! Come on in!"

Harry allowed himself to be hustled over to a seat near the fire, taking the large cup of too strong tea that Hagrid gave him. "Err, thanks. No, I just came down because I heard a few students talking about a three-headed dog and... well, you're not the Care of Magical Creatures professor but everyone I asked said you're even better than Kettleburn." Harry grinned and leaned forward. "So, is there a three-headed dog in the school?"

"How'd they find out about Fluffy?"

There was a muffled crash from somewhere in the rear of the hut and Harry whipped out his wand, ready to hex whoever the interloper was. "Rubeus Hagrid!" A slim blonde girl wearing a uniform trimmed in Hufflepuff yellow and black emerged from the back room and put her hands on her hips, reminding Harry greatly of Molly Weasley when the twins did something wrong. "Did you or did you not tell me at the end of last year that you'd leave that mutt of yours at home this year? The last thing you need is someone getting bit by one of your pets when you're trying to get Headmaster Dumbledore to give you Kettleburn's job after he retires next year."

Hagrid actually appeared to blush a bit at the rebuke, staring down at his feet as he fidgeted. "Erm, I did leave Fluffy at home, Janae. Hogwarts. This is where I live. I thought ye knew that?"

"I... I... damnit!" Janae stomped across the room, throwing herself down onto the chair next to Harry and crossing her arms over her chest as she sulked. "I can't believe I fell for that one." Suddenly, she jerked upright and rocketed from her chair, spinning in a circle as she regarded the room with wild eyes. "Wait. If Fluffy's still here... where's that runespoor you promised me you were 'bringing home' last summer?"

Looking nervous, Hagrid whistled softly as he tried to look anywhere but at Janae. Then something black and orange dropped from the rafters of the hut, causing Janae to shriek as it landed on her shoulders, the tail curling around her torso. Three heads turned to stare at her, tongues flicking out to taste the air. § You rang? §

Janae screamed, grabbing the six-foot long snake and hurling it at the wall. "Hagrid!"

The runespoor hit the stone wall near the fireplace with an annoyed hiss, surging away from the roaring fire to a slightly safer spot in the middle of the floor. Then, much to Harry's combined astonishment and amusement, the middle head burst into song. § Alas, my love, you do me wrong, to cast me off discourteously. For I have loved you well and long, delighting in your company. §

Swaying back and forth, the left and right heads joined their brother in song. § Greensleeves was all my joy, greensleeves was my delight. Greensleeves was my heart of gold, and who but my lady greensleeves? §

Harry had to bite his lip to avoid laughing out loud at the runespoor's antics, wondering where it'd picked up a muggle song from. Or maybe it was a song that had originated in the wizarding world and seeped out to the muggle masses? Far too often, he'd assumed some historical figure to be a muggle only to have Hermione inform him otherwise. Actually... did it really matter?

As Hagrid stammered apologies and hustled the three-headed snake from the room, Janae huffed and retook her seat next to Harry, rubbing her hands over her arms and shuddering. "Now that we're done with that foolishness... my name's Janae Cram. Fifth year Hufflepuff. My twin sister's one of your prefects?" Oh, right. This was the sister Cherise had mentioned on the first night, then, who she'd encouraged them to annoy by calling Cherise and pretending to mistake for her... far prettier sister who couldn't be mistaken for this girl unless one was blind. And possibly drunk as well. "Hagrid's trying to get himself together and apply for Professor Kettleburn's job when he retires and since I really love magical creatures too, I figured I'd help him out by sharing my class notes, telling him what we did for homework, and so on."

"Wicked." Harry wondered if there'd been a Janae in his own universe that was responsible for Hagrid's ascension to teacher in his third year. Maybe down the road he could get access to a pensieve and examine his memories of the first three years' mealtimes to see if he could spot her. "So, you don't like the

runespoor or Fluffy? Have something against animals with three heads?"

Janae shook her head, waving her wand and summoning a photo off the mantle above the fireplace. In it, Hagrid stood over Fluffy like a proud father, petting the dog's back as the heads took turns licking the face of a laughing Janae. Back then, though, the cerberus had only been slightly bigger than a large muggle dog. "It's nothing against Fluffy, but now that he's huge... he's a risk to the students. I just don't want anyone to get hurt. Then again, I'd take Fluffy over that runespoor of his. At least you can calm Fluffy down with some music. That runespoor is just plain dangerous. If you get bit by the right head... well, your head of house is going to be writing a letter to give your parents their condolences."

Hmmm. As funny as a snake that could keep itself company sounded for a pet... he probably wouldn't be able to convince his parents to let him buy one if they were that poisonous. Drat. Harry nodded, giving an exaggerated wince as well. "Yeah, I can see why you might not like the runespoor. So what about Fluffy? Where do you get a three-headed dog from, anyways? A Duplication Charm gone horribly wrong? Transfiguration homework of yours that you got a Troll on?"

"I bought him off a Greek chappie I met in the pub las' year." Hagrid emerged from the other room, short one runespoor. "I was goin' to sell him off to be a guard at a magical animal reserve, but Dumbledore wanted me to keep him around in case we needed a new guard for..." He trained off and winced. "Never you mind."

Leaning over, Janae nudged Harry in the ribs. "That's about as far as I've heard him go. One time, he mentioned someone named Nicholas Flammel. It's all really mysterious. Makes me want to go up to that corridor and see what Fluffy's guarding, now that they've replaced whatever attacked my sister with a beast I know how to get past."

Harry nodded, finding himself with a lot of answers to his questions. Fluffy was the second guardian; Cherise had gone up against something else and been hospitalized... probably obliterated so she couldn't share tales of her encounter, too. But if Fluffy was there now and had the same weakness as his universe's Fluffy, he was all

set. Idly, he wished Lara was already at Hogwarts. It would have been interesting to pit her... unique talents... against Fluffy.

"Tempus!" Smoke emerged from the end of his wand, curling to form the time. Harry gave another overdone wince and set his cup of tea down, making a show of adjusting his hat and scarf. "Well, I need to get up to the library. Promised Su and Hermione I'd go over this week's transfiguration assignments with them. Hagrid, Janae, if you want to use me as a test student, I'd love to come hear about magical creatures some time. Just send an owl up to the castle."

As he hurried out the door, mind buzzing with plans regarding Quirrell and the Philosopher's Stone, Harry winced as Janae's voice reached his ears. "You may have a good reason for Fluffy, Hagrid, but what's your excuse for that damned runespoor still being around?"

Poor Hagrid.

On the list to go home for the holidays this time around, Harry found himself sneaking out of Gryffindor Tower one night to complete something he'd done a week or so later in his original universe. Without his invisibility cloak - or rather the infamous Cloak of Invisibility - it was a bit harder for him but he still knew the school better than anyone alive short of the headmaster and he easily reached the room housing the Mirror of Erised without being caught. Even knowing he'd eventually confront it as part of the Stone's defenses, he'd decided to seek it out early to answer a burning question: what would he see reflecting in it in this universe? Last time, he'd seen himself with his parents. Here, his parents were alive and he had family that extended even beyond them. So now what was his greatest desire?

Stepping in front of the mirror, Harry took a deep breath and slowly lowered the intricate mental shields that kept him protected from outside intrusions. As the layers fell away one by one, an image gradually appeared in the mirror, growing more and more distinct as he revealed more of his mind to the magical artifact. Then the last barrier dropped, and Harry stared at the result.

A version of himself in his late teens was sitting on a throne-like chair, Voldemort's decapitated head impaled on a pike beside it. Kneeling at his feet were three girls he recognized well from his

dreams: the buxom Su and even more voluptuous Tracey bookending the younger Lara as she fiddled with the chanter of a red and black tartan bagpipe. Daphne and Luna were seated at his left and right hand, or rather on the arms of the chair, with his own arms wrapped around their waists to keep them in place. Unlike in his dreams, they actually seemed capable of getting along here... which he supposed made sense; if he was to end up with more than one person, he wouldn't want them bickering constantly.

Off to the left of the chair, Hermione stood behind Jasmine with her arms wrapped around the younger redhead's waist, Rose a foot or two further to the left and hugging a book to her chest. Suddenly the image blurred and switched, with Rose in his friend's arms and Jasmine beside them holding a broom. Trying to figure that one out had the potential to tie him up all night, so Harry looked over at the space to the right of his mirror self's throne... and froze. His mother and Narcissa were standing together as they stared down adoringly at an infant with a shock of dark red hair atop its head. Holy hell. Was that even possible? Caught up in trying to figure that out, Harry almost missed the appearance of Tara as his cousin swooped in from the side, gently taking what would be their mutual half-sibling from Narcissa's arms and slipping a bottle into the baby's mouth as she wandered over to join the other teens.

Moving closer, Harry studied the odd apparition, wishing he was dealing with a pensieve instead of a magical mirror so he could walk all the way around the odd tableau and examine it from all sides. Defeating Voldemort... that was a clear and understandable desire. No Voldemort, no dead loved ones. Hermione with one of his sisters... well, at least then she'd probably shed her awkward crush on his mother. And it would be two less guys circling his group and tugging at its members, potentially causing problems as they forced his friends to choose between boyfriends and best friends. Lara, Su, Tracey, Tara... he liked having a few good close friends instead of a lot of acquaintances. Maybe that's what they represented?

His mom and Narcissa... well, he got on a lot better with Cissy than he did with James Potter. Was it any real surprise that Harry wanted him out of the picture and the two most important adults in his life happy together?

That just left the matter of the two gorgeous young women perched on the arms of his doppelgänger's chair. Daphne and Luna. He

could understand the latter, given the combination of his past love for her and the body she would supposedly grow into in this world. But Daphne? They got on well enough but it made Harry wonder exactly how the mirror worked if this was his 'greatest desire'.

Hmm. Maybe Daphne was a metaphor? She'd been the third person in his first and only multiple partner experience to date; she could represent a desire to make that sort of thing a more permanent part of his life in the future even if she herself wasn't the person he did it with. For that matter, given they'd both been a part of said threesome, the same could be said about Luna.

It made more sense the more he thought about it: did he really want Lara, Su, Tracey, and Tara to be the only friends he ever had? No; they were his friends now and so they probably served as a metaphor representing that same group of close friends in the future, which would probably contain those four but could contain others as well. And he'd already figured out that Hermione and the twins represented dating safety and sanity all around, so that fit with the same pattern as everyone else.

Still, even if they were all metaphors, the basic message was there: he wanted to defeat Voldemort and then live out his life surrounded by his friends and a spouse or two. Harry grinned; he could get behind that plan. As he slowly began reconstructing his occlumency shields, the image in the mirror faded away as the enchanted object's magic lost its hold on him.

He didn't return to the Mirror of Erised again after that first night.

The day after the end of term, Harry found himself joining his friends on the Hogwarts Express almost against his wishes. There were fireplaces in Hogwarts and Hogsmeade; he could have easily floored home and spared himself the long ride. Or apparated there on his own, if push came to shove. But tradition was tradition and so instead he had a long ride back to London via rail to look forward to. Maybe he'd have a little fun and dive off the train a bit outside of town and fly the rest of the way to King's Cross. If his father was going to be absentee, he might as well give the man a reason: let James spend the afternoon running up and down the line obliterating all the muggles who'd seen him.

But, since he knew that would just result in his mother yelling at him for riling up his father - which she would take the brunt of, rather than him - Harry instead found himself in the same compartment as his September ride to Hogwarts as the train chugged towards London. Thankfully the company was good, as the girls got in some last minute transfiguration practical work before Hermione returned to a house targeted by a Ministry sensor, Daphne and Tracey curled up on either side of him and offering tidbits of advice to Tara, Su, and Hermione as the trio worked.

Looking down at the head resting on his shoulder, Harry bit his lip to avoid chuckling and waking Daphne. Or rather she had been pitching in advice. At some point, she had lost interest in Hermione and Su's compulsive studying and one-upmanship and dozed off, clutching his arm possessively as she snuggled against his side. Luckily for him, she was on his left and in full view of anyone who passed by their compartment, serving as an effective deterrent against anyone entertaining thoughts of stopping by for a visit. Between his quidditch performance and Samhuinn, the girls of Hogwarts had evidently decided to disregard his age and start paying more attention to him... and quite frankly, it creeped him out. Not just because he was eleven on the outside - and the inside, as best they knew - but because it reminded him far too much of the blind adoration he received as the Boy-Who-Lived in his old world. At least during the good times. Despite the fact that she was persona non grata with the truly elite because of her father's situation, she served as a rather effective shield against the rest of the female population. And those who didn't take a step back due to the reputation she'd developed after hexing Neville... well, he was a 'filthy half-blood' to them and so they didn't want him anyways.

Honestly, Daphne was a bit of a mystery to him. Every time Harry thought he had her figured out, she went and did something that reminded him that girls were a breed of creature more bizarre than anything Hagrid brought to class. She had announced her blood status and future plans on the first night, attacked Neville for responding, and then latched right on to Harry despite her assertions that she wasn't looking for something yet. She ranged from platonically affectionate in public to times like now, which he was pretty sure were beyond the level of comfort most girls her age were supposed to feel around boys. The more he thought about it, the more symbiotic their relationship seemed. Oh, she was genuinely his friend, Harry didn't think she was using him. But their

respective needs sorta lent themselves towards mutual symbiosis: she provided him with a shield against creepy girls and he - being the heir of a prominent enough family himself - provided her with a similar shield against those who would want to cozy up to her for all the wrong reasons.

Before he could lose himself in circular mental wanderings about his friendship with Daphne, the universe decided to provide Harry with a distraction in the form of Neville Longbottom and his sycophants. It really was amusing how much of a dark-haired Draco the Boy-Who-Lived had turned out to be: he had his Crabbe and Goyle in Larry and Seamus - Dean and Megan were evidently the Dean and Seamus of this world, leaving the Irish boy free to trail after Neville - and a Pansy in Anne Weasley. "Potter."

"Wow, after four months sharing a dorm, you know what my last name is." Harry gave a mocking little clap at that. "Congratulations. I'm sure we'll have you remembering my entire name by the end of the year."

Longbottom bristled a bit at the condescending tone in Harry's voice, as well as the giggles that came from the girls in the compartment. "Listen, Potter, you've shown that maybe you're not as useless as I thought. So I figured I'd give you another chance." Stepping further into the compartment, he put himself between Harry and the girls on the opposite bench, holding out his hand. "I'm feeling generous, so I'll even let you bring Daphne and the snake along with you. All you need to do is stop hanging out with the mudblood and these other two losers."

Both the mention of her own name and the casual disregard for half-sister had Daphne stirring but Harry squeezed her thigh in warning before pulling his arm from her grasp and rising from his seat. Longbottom took a step backwards, making Harry chuckle softly. "Considering one of those losers knocked out a few of your teeth and Daphne here has made a fool of you too, you really might want to watch what you say in this compartment. Now get out before Pomfrey ends up having to make another visit to the Express to fix you up." Harry took a step toward the Boy-Who-Lived, but surprisingly enough his opponent held his ground this time. "Now. Or do you want to see if you do any better against me than three adult mountain trolls?"

"Please, Potter, I saw what happened to you after the trolls. Fine, so you stun me. And then you pass out and Larry and Seamus pound you into a bloody mess, plus I get my parents to haul you in for assaulting the Boy-Who-Lived." Longbottom grinned widely, spreading his arms out away from his body. "Go ahead. Try your luck."

Harry pondered the invitation, before deciding to accept it. After all, maybe another round of 'Abuse the Wanker' might encourage the pudgy prat to seek entertainment elsewhere in the future. Surging forward, Harry slipped past Longbottom and watched as the boy spun to try and face him before doing it again and hooking his arm around his opponent's throat. Keeping the boy pinned in place, Harry watched as Hermione rose from her seat and slammed her fist into Longbottom's gut, following it up with a hard knee to the crotch. Harry let go as the Boy-Who-Lived wheezed and tipped over, curling into a ball with his hands over his privates. "Hmm. That was pretty lucky, eh?"

Snorting in laughter, Hermione settled back into her seat and grabbed the book she'd set down between her and Su upon Neville's entry. "You don't need luck to beat Neville Longbottom. I'd say all you need is a pulse, but I'm pretty sure zombies and vampires would be able to take him too."

"True, true." Harry retook his seat between Tracey and Daphne, eyeing the pair of shocked boys in the doorway. Where had Anne gone? Mehh, did it really matter? "Well? You're his minions. Make yourselves useful and drag him out of here. Especially with how hard Hermione hit him in the stomach; he's probably going to puke any minute now and I don't want that stench in here." Glaring at him, Seamus and Larry nevertheless obeyed, one grabbing his arms as the other grabbed his legs. Puffing softly, they hustled the boy out of the compartment and off down the hall. "Good boys." Drawing his wand, Harry closed the door behind them and locked it before returning his attention to his friends. "So, who's doing what for the holidays?"

The other four girls seemed a bit ill at ease after his and Hermione's casual display of physical violence but they eventually managed to shake it off, Su responding to the question first. "Well, my parents and I are portkeying back to Shanghai for a few days to spend time with the entire family. We're spread out all around the world but the

family's single biggest property is in China and so it's the easiest place for us all to meet. I'll be back in the country on the 29th, though, if you want to get together for New Years?"

"Well, Tracey and I will be staying at Greengrass Manor over the hols because Mother still isn't entirely comfortable with Aunt Claudia's muggle home. Or is it her muggle relatives? Whichever. Anyways, maybe it'd be best if we all met there for New Year's?" Daphne went around the compartment, pointing at each person in turn. "Su, I doubt your parents want a bunch of people invading their house right after they get back from vacation. Hermione, your house is out because the only way we could get there is the Knight Bus and... well, I'd talk my parents into hosting a party for everyone in our year before I'd go for a ride on that thing. Tara, your father is... your father. Enough said?" Tara contemplated that for a moment before inclining her head in resigned agreement. "Harry has two little sisters and his cousin around the house. I may have a sister but I can always lock her in her room or something if she becomes too much of a pest. One versus three makes me the lesser evil, right?"

That made sense to him at least. Harry knew he'd have a lot more fun without having to worry about Jasmine or Rose wandering in to bug him or, even worse, Dora deciding to come in and embarrass 'ickle Harrykins' with some story about the boy he'd replaced... not that his friends would know it wasn't about him. But while the logic was sound, the decision wasn't entirely his. "Sounds good to me. Su? Hermione? Tara?"

Su shrugged and turned to look first at Hermione, then Tara. "It's up to you two. Daphne's right; I don't think my parents would let me have even a small party for friends right after we get back to England. Or let me go to Malfoy Manor for one, what with the bad reputation the family has. No offense, Tara."

"None taken. After Samhuinn, I'm not looking forward to seeing my father either." Tara shuddered. "And Malfoy Manor isn't exactly cheerful at any time of year. Not to mention that if I know my father, he's planning to have a get together with some friends who... well, they wouldn't take kindly to half of you being there just because of who your parents are." Death Eaters, then. Harry filed that one away; maybe he could sneak off for a few minutes and take out some trash on New Year's Eve?

All eyes turned to Hermione, who blinked. "What? Why's everyone looking at me?" She pointed across the compartment at Harry. "I'm at his house from Boxing Day until we go back to school. My parents are coming over for New Year's Eve, but I'm sure they'd rather talk with your parents than babysit me, so they probably won't mind if I'm at Daphne's with you."

Harry blinked and sat up a bit straighter at that bit of information. "Wait, what? When did that happen?"

Sighing, Hermione slouched a bit in her seat so she could kick him in the shin. "I knew you weren't actually paying attention to me when I spoke. I told you about that the night my new quidditch pads arrived... and after the game... and the day we had to put our names on the list to go home... and last night..."

"Oh. That'll teach me to just assume you're rambling on about something school-related that I'm already better than you at and tune you out." Harry grinned and dodged another kick, trapping Hermione's foot with his legs. "So, not that I mind or anything, but why are you moving in for most of the hols?"

Hermione scowled and tugged, trying to free her foot. "I should just leave you wondering, seeing as how I told you that four times already too. But, since I'm feeling generous, I'll tell you a fifth time. When your mother was helping make my pads, Jasmine asked me if I'd come over and let her try her hand at chaser against me sometime. Since your family was covering the materials and your mum was doing all the work, I felt a bit guilty and figured it was the least I could do. Then your mom went and asked if I wanted to come over for part of the Christmas hols, Jasmine looked really excited at the prospect of getting to fly against me sooner rather than later, and so I agreed."

And so it began. As best Harry remembered from his original self's journal, he was the only one of the three children who took after his father and had an interest in flying or sports. So Hermione had obviously caught Jasmine's eye at some point - had his mother come to Hogwarts when he was otherwise occupied to work with Hermione face-to-face and brought the twins? If his dreams truly were oneiromancy or some other kind divinatory ability and Jasmine and Rose would end up sharing Hermione, this might be how they started growing closer. And while he'd missed it the first few times

through, he'd noticed as of late that the twins had individuated on more than one level by fifth year: not only did they have differing hairstyles, but one was a bit leaner and more athletic looking while the other was slightly softer and more voluptuous looking, albeit nothing on Luna or Su's level, much less Tracey's. This could explain why: Jasmine was engaging Hermione using quidditch as an in, and Rose would probably appeal to her bookish side. He could ponder his potentially prophetic dreams later, though. Participate in the conversation at hand now. "Right then. Party at Daphne's house." Harry looked down at his strawberry blonde limpet. "Assuming your family won't mind, of course."

Daphne grinned up at him in a way that sent shivers down his spine. "Oh, I'm certain they'll approve. After all, Mother and Father are quite interested in meeting you."

Well. That was ominous.

"Harry!" Harry spun around to find a familiar head of red hair cutting through the crowd toward him. His mother looked a bit harried, wrapping an arm around him even as her wand blurred into motion, shrinking his trunk and summoning it before tucking it away into a pocket of her muggle jeans. "Listen, I don't know what you did and I don't want to hear about it now. But unless you want a public scene with the Longbottoms, we need to get out of here, now."

Harry rolled his eyes but allowed himself to be pulled away, waving to his friends. "I'll owl you guys!" They waved back and then Harry turned forward to keep from tripping over something as he was dragged along. "Considering you're pulling me away from the fireplaces and the portal to muggle King's Cross... I don't suppose you somehow managed to get your hand on a Ministry-approved portkey for us? Maybe figure out how to make your own?"

Shaking her head, Lily continued to guide him toward the end of the platform and the complex web of rail lines beyond. "Sorry, sweetie, we were supposed to go by floo but the Longbottoms were between where I found you and the fireplaces. I know you hate it, but I'm going to have to side-along you back to the house."

"Oh no you're not. I'll walk back to Cornwall." If there was one thing Harry hated more than getting dropped on his ass by a portkey or floo journey, it was being dragged through apparition by someone

stretching their own magic to try and envelop him as well. Very few had the reserves - and skill - to do it comfortably. His mother was not one of those people. "Let's get to a clear spot, you hug me like you're going to side-along me, and I'll side-along you."

Snorting loudly, Lily rolled her eyes. "Yes, because you doing something else against the law is exactly what we need right now. Besides, just because you can go hopping around the neighborhood doesn't mean I trust you to apparate the two of us all the way back to Perranarworthal."

Harry grumbled under his breath. He was not getting side-alonged all the way home. He'd actually enjoyed a few snacks on the Express and wanted them to stay in his stomach where they belonged, thank you very much. Maybe she'd fall for... "Look, Mum, here comes Lady Malfoy!" Lily whipped around and Harry lunged forward, hugging her from behind. Something shockingly crude erupted from his mother's lips and Harry chuckled before gathering his magic and sending them hurtling through space towards Potter Manor. Having covertly tweaked the wards over the summer to accept his magical signature as an acceptable inbound traveler, Harry brought them in for a landing out behind the house and, instead of absorbing the remaining magic of their apparition back into himself, deliberately allowed the magic bubble to explode outward with a thunderous crack. "And voila. Home sweet home."

Pinching the bridge of her nose, Lily sighed. "Why do I even bother? Fine. But if the aurors show up to arrest you for illegal apparition, I'm letting them stuff you in a holding cell until your father realizes you're there and bails you out. Either your father will finally do something about your 'natural talent' for apparition, you'll stop doing it, or both." The back door of the house opened and Lily pasted a smile on as identical faces peered out. "Girls! Look who I found wandering around King's Cross!"

"Mum, we're ten and not part-troll. We're not stupid. Of course you found Harry at King's Cross; you went there to pick him up from the Express. Now if you'd come back without him or with someone else instead, that would be interesting." Jasmine shivered as the temperature registered and took a step back, retreating into the warmth of the house. Lily and Harry followed her, heading for the kitchen as Jasmine shut the door and gave chase. "Why'd you apparate instead of using the floo, though? It's cold out."

The fireplace flared green and a red-clad figure emerged just in time to hear Jasmine's question and reply. "Probably didn't want to go near the crowd I found when I came through the floo to the platform to try and meet up with them." Waving her wand over her cloak, Dora removed the ash that had accumulated from two floo trips in rapid succession and then tucked it into the bun she'd pulled her hair into for the day, drawing Harry's attention to the fact that she'd chosen to take a page from her aunt's book and morph her hair to be black with a blonde streak up each side. "There was one hell of a fight going on between close to a dozen families. Auror Captain Longbottom was insisting that Harry here beat his son up, and there were three kids willing to back his son's account of things. Then on the other side there were five girls - my cousin included, might I add - who were claiming that one of them took Longbottom down after he instigated a fight. From the looks of the girl, I believed them. Mean looking little thing. As I was ducking back into the floo, the girls were volunteering to come to the Ministry and give statements under truth serum, which seemed to shut the Longbottoms up right quick." Hopping up onto one of the kitchen island's stools, Dora smirked at him as she 'let her hair down'... or rather stood it up, going from the longer blonde-streaked black look to the bubblegum pink spikes he was used to seeing her with. Then she let out a curse as her wand fell out of her now shorter hair, tumbling off the stool as she attempted to catch it. Shooting to her feet, she did her best to look nonchalant as she slid back onto her stool and tucked her wand up her sleeve. "So... Harrykins... have an interesting train ride?"

"Well, I did get a Falco Aesalon chocolate frog card..."

By the time the dinner rolled around and James returned home, any impending explosion was put on hold in favor of a slightly late meal of roast chicken, potatoes, and mixed vegetables that Harry had prepared for the family while Lily ran interference by taking the twins over to Diagon Alley for an 'emergency apothecary run'. In the end, though, the inevitable came to pass and Harry found himself being escorted into his father's study.

"Now, I know you think you know why you're in here but you're wrong." Harry opened his mouth but James held up a hand up to stop him. "I don't have the time to deal with your discipline; you know that falls to your mother - no matter how often she tries to foist it off on me - because she's the one around to enforce it. Not that

there's really anything to discipline you for; we managed to get the real story after a bit and you would have been an accessory to your friend's assault but the Longbottoms aren't pressing charges because they don't want the matter ending up in the Daily Prophet."

Oh. Huh. Harry blinked stupidly. That was unexpected. Well then, if he wasn't in trouble... "Why do you need to talk to me, then?"

His father sighed, opening one of his desk's drawers and pulling out three thick letters that he then laid on the desk. Removing his glasses, James rubbed the bridge of his nose for a moment. "Your grandfather Charlus was a rather forward-thinking wizard for the time and so any families that came sniffing around with an interest in marrying into the family were politely but firmly sent on their way. So I'm not quite sure how to handle my eleven-year-old son receiving three marriage contract offers before the halfway point of his first year at Hogwarts."

Leaning in, Harry plucked the three letters off the desk and gave each a slow once over before returning his attention to his father. "So why haven't you gotten rid of these, then?"

"Well for one, I have no idea what I'm doing. I never had to deal with things because heads of family approached my father to try and arrange a marriage between me and their daughter. And Sirius has no clue either; he was cast out before he was old enough for it to become a problem. For all I know, if the damn things aren't opened and responded to within a certain period of time, I'll have to pay each family some sort of odd rejection fee or some such." James slid his glasses back on and met Harry's gaze. "I barely have enough time for what's on my plate as it is; I can't afford to deal with this. You're growing up and that means it's time for you to take on more responsibilities around here. So I want you to open them, read them, and deal with them. Talk to your mother, maybe that Greengrass girl you're friends with... at this point, you can invite Tara and Narcissa Malfoy over for tea and beg them for help for all I care. Just take care of things. Understand?"

Affecting a look of wide-eyed disbelief, Harry glanced from his father to the letters he was holding and back. "But Dad... I'm eleven. Aren't I too young for..."

James scoffed and waved a dismissive hand at Harry. "If you're old enough to own a wand and a broom, you're old enough to have some input when it comes to your future. Any other questions? I had to bring paperwork home from work to finish because I got tied up with the mess you and your friends created with the Longbottoms today."

"I... um... no? I guess I'll go upstairs, open these, and write to Lady Malfoy. Then I need to figure out what work I have left to do over the holidays. Sooner that's done, the more time I have for flying and other fun stuff." His father nodded approvingly and Harry made his way out of the man's study, waving to his mother as he passed through the sitting room and thundering up two flights of stairs to the second floor. Well, he would write to his mother's companion to let her know about this new opening for visits but after what he'd gone through in his old world... it wasn't as if he needed the help. No need to drag her into his affairs if she could be spending the time keeping his mother happy.

As soon as his door was shut behind him, Harry took a deep breath and opened the first envelope. Pulling out the letter inside, he unfolded it and skimmed through the fairly standardized opening language until he found the name he was looking for: Daphne Greengrass. Well, that was a surprise in a way that wasn't. Between his display on Samhuinn, the status of his own family, and the fact that he was already friends with their daughter, of course her parents would be eyeing him as a potential spouse for their darling daughter. But she was one girl. Who were the other two from?

Harry stuffed Daphne's letter back into the envelope and set it aside, staring at the other two suspiciously. Neither had any sort of curse or hex on it, though, so they were theoretically safe enough to open. Picking one of the two at random, he opened it and scanned through until he found the name of the girl being offered to him. Or rather girls. Flora and Hestia Carrow. He both remembered them from his world and had heard of them here via Tara. Considering the whispers about them doing 'everything' together, was it really surprising he'd received a joint contract for the pair of them? Thinking back, he was pretty sure he'd never even talked to them here and so he mentally filed it under pureblood power games; he'd deal with the pair when he got back to Hogwarts. It made him leery of the remaining letter, though. Who next? Pansy Parkinson? Romilda Vane? Astoria Greengrass, just in case he didn't want to

marry someone who was already his good friend? Padma? Parvati?
A Carrow-esque offer of both of twins?

Tearing it open and scanning through the enclosed letter, the answer ended up being one of the few that he didn't guess: Luna Lovegood.

What the bloody hell?

Joe's Note: One thing I felt was weird about SilverAegis's version of this was Harry turning into Santa Claus when it came to his siblings. Granted I was an only child, but most of my friends confirm my belief that when they were his age and on an allowance, parents got something but siblings did not because of monetary restrictions - or more accurately, "why should I spend what little money you give me on them?". Granted Harry can pull gifts out of essentially nowhere thanks to a combination of conjuration, transfiguration, and charms work, but it'd raise eyebrows - especially in an eleven-year-old - from a behavioral standpoint, to say nothing of a financial one. Last but not least, if you want to PM me to continue a line of discussion from one of my review replies... for the love of God, people, make sure you have PMs enabled on your profile. I can't respond if you don't.

Stepping out of Twilfit and Tattings, Harry pocketed the shrunken package that contained Daphne's presents - a new winter cloak, gloves, and a hat he'd bought as a bit of a gag gift - and mentally checked off another person on his Christmas shopping list. He had already volunteered to do another enormous breakfast for the family on Christmas Day, meaning his present to his parents was taken care of, and he'd acquired something for Hermione, Su, Tara, Daphne, and Tracey. He had an idea for how to continue kissing up to his favorite prefect - because one never knew when having someone in power who was willing to cover for you might come in handy - while gaining the chance to learn basic Ancient Runes, and had even picked up a little something to give Narcissa just in case she'd bought something for him. For Dora, he had a very special non-physical present planned and since he doubted he was supposed to get stuff for his sisters - his parents, after all, would not only give them presents as Mum and Dad but as Father Christmas, meaning they'd have plenty to open come Christmas Day - that left only Luna.

Looking around, Harry realized he was at the end of the alley and the only two stores he'd yet to visit at this end were a charity shop and Ollivander's, Olivia Waters emerging from the latter with her usual set of Weasley twin bookends as she swished her wand back and forth enthusiastically. Maybe she'd finally purchased her own after a year and a half of using an inherited one? Hmm. Ollivander's was out because he could hardly buy her a wand and she was too young to own one, making any sort of complimentary accessory worthless. And even though Luna was a bit odd, or at least his had

been, he didn't want to buy her a Christmas present from someone else's leavings. Instead Harry decided to retrace his steps back up Diagon Alley to see if anything else caught his attention.

As he passed Gringotts, the Longbottoms emerged and Frank halted so he could pin Harry with a fierce glare even as his wife yanked their son behind her. Harry merely raised an eyebrow at their behavior; did they really think he would attack the Boy-Who-Lived out here in broad daylight without provocation? Especially now that they knew that the injuries the boy had suffered on the train had come from an incident he'd instigated? As long as their chubby wanker of a son didn't start problems, Harry - and his friends - wouldn't end them. Rolling his eyes, he turned away and made his way through the crowd toward where he promised to meet his mother. She was waiting for him, a warming charm having removed the snow and chill from the seat in front of Fortescue's as she sat reading a book. "Done, sweetie?"

"All but two. Cherise Cram and Luna Lovegood." Harry sighed and ran a hand through his hair. After meeting an athletic Hermione, female Draco and Ron, male Lavender, and numerous other people who weren't quite what he remembered, he wasn't willing to assume he 'knew' Luna at all. So, if he was treating her as an unknown... "How am I supposed to buy a present for somebody I'm not sure I know and therefore probably know nothing about? I could get something completely wrong for her or, even worse, influence her into becoming the Luna I knew instead of the Luna she should be here."

Closing her book, Lily rose to her feet and rolled her shoulders, letting out a truly disturbing cracking noise. Harry shuddered; were humans supposed to be capable of those sorts of sounds? If that's what getting old meant, maybe he'd try to send himself back in time again in another nine or ten years. "Isn't that a bit hypocritical, considering that's basically what you're doing with all your friends, Harry?" Touché. "But I see your point. Are you sure you want to get her a present at all? You are going over there to decline her offer, after all, not accept it. Save presents for when you're actually friends?"

Harry shook his head, turning and heading toward Flourish and Blotts as his mother fell into step beside him. He needed at least one book and maybe he'd see something in here that would spark

an idea when it came to buying Luna's present too. "Well, I figured I'd go over there, let her down easy, and then jump right in to trying to make a new friend out of her. If she's anything like my Luna... even if we never end up together, I want her by my side." The more he did in this world, the more ripples he cast and the less useful his own knowledge of the future became... but if this Luna was anything like his, she could easily compensate for the decreasing usefulness of his memories with her observational abilities and rather unique world view.

"Well, I'm not sure how that'll actually work out for you but it makes sense on paper at least. Alright, I haven't seen Luna since back when Selene Lovegood was still stuck pushing a pram everywhere so I can't tell you anything about the girl herself." After a moment's consideration, Lily pointed towards the charms section of the bookstore. "I do, however, know that Selene has a mastery in charms and has done some fascinating work in the field. A few of my own charms are based off of papers she's published over the years. And I've found a few small booklets written by her on James's desk when I'm cleaning, so she knows enough about the dark arts and defense that she's created a few spells for the Auror Corps. One or both of those might have rubbed off on Luna. Or if the poor thing takes after her father Oddment..."

Just like every other time, Harry couldn't help the chuckle that emerged when he heard the first name of Luna's father in this universe. He wasn't sure whether it was better or worse than Xenophilius, although it was definitely funnier. "Oddment?"

Lily's lips quirked up. "His friends call him Odd. So do the rest of us. But anyways, Odd runs a magazine called The Quibbler. It's... well, a bit wild. Still, she might have decided to take after him and so a book on writing might be right up her alley. Or maybe some fancy quills and ink? Other than that, I'm tapped out, Harry. I may be a woman, but that doesn't mean I have a telepathic link to every other woman on Earth. Speaking of women, though, what are you going to do about the Carrows? Presents for the twins as well?"

"Considering their father is one of the Death Eaters who got off after the first war, I was half-tempted to send him a rejection letter charmed to explode violently when opened. I took out Amycus and Alecko last time around; why not get an early start on pruning the Carrow family tree in this world?" That earned Harry a horrified look

but he waved it off. "I said half-tempted. According to Tara, the twins are outcasts in the house. I'm going to reject the offer, but I'm thinking I might want to recruit them to be my ears in the dungeons. Watch over Tara for me, too."

"So we still need gifts for Luna, that Cherise girl, and the twins."

"I suppose." Wandering over to the section on ancient runes, Harry snagged a copy of Spellman's Syllabary off the shelf and tucked it under one arm. That took care of Reese; he knew the girl was struggling with Ancient Runes in her OWL year and would appreciate the extra reference material. That left Luna and the twins and after looking around again, Harry decided to give up on both. He had an idea for the twins but it didn't involve books, while Luna probably had access to all the charms and DADA books the store had to offer via her mother. And writing was probably an apprenticeship or natural talent-based profession in the wizarding world, so why would they sell books about it to the common man? He sighed. That made things more complicated, because it was the best idea he had left... although that didn't mean much, given it was the only idea he had left. "Mum? Can we convert a few galleons and go out onto Charing Cross Road? I want to find a muggle bookstore, and maybe a jewelry store. Actually, I have an idea for the Carrows that would require a tiny bit of orichalcum too, so maybe Gringotts for galleons and pounds, a jewelry store on this side of the Cauldron, and then out into London?"

Eyes lighting up, Lily nodded and dragged him towards the front counter of the store. After purchasing the book, Lily shrank it and Harry added it to the pile of other things he'd purchased that day. "I can't wait. I haven't been out into muggle London in years. No matter how hard I tried to make sure you all were muggle-literate, I was always terrified your father or you kids would slip and say or do something wrong. We both know I won't have that problem with you, so... yay." She looked him over with a critical eye before nodding. "You look close enough to pass. Alright, let's go take care of the bank and the jewelry store on this side. After that... well, I doubt the stores are still the same as I remember them being, but we'll figure something out."

When Christmas morning dawned, Harry was more excited than he'd ever been before for the holiday. The closest he'd ever come to a real celebration was in his fifth year, at Grimmauld Place with

Sirius and the Weasleys, but now he had his parents, sisters, Remus, and Sirius and his family to celebrate it with. Being included by the Weasleys was all well and good, but it never really made up for his lack of true family... and the more he experienced in this world, the more he became aware of that.

For once he woke up without the assistance of his alarm clock, mostly because he hadn't bothered setting it the night before. Harry had expected his sisters to come and pry him out of bed far before... he stared blearily at the clock before finding his glasses and slipping them on. Wow. He'd made it all the way to nine o'clock? That was impressive for Christmas Day. Was something wrong?

Harry slid out of bed, hissing a bit in displeasure as his feet hit the cold wooden floors and twisting back and forth to loosen up his back. Then he stopped and let out a rueful chuckle. There'd be no run today, either around the lake at school or around the neighborhood. Christmas and all. So instead, Harry just summoned his wand from where it rested on his nightstand and cast a Warming Charm - thank God he'd finally gotten around to looking those up - over his body so he wouldn't need slippers or heavier clothing around the house. That done, he set out to investigate what the rest of his family was up to.

His first stop was Rose's room, where he stopped in the doorway and chuckled. The poor girl had fallen asleep sitting up leaning against the window while waiting for Father Christmas and was more than likely going to wake up with a hell of a pain in her neck. Flicking his wand, Harry floated her up and across the room, placing her in her bed where she belonged before canceling the charm and moving off to check on Jasmine.

Entering Jasmine's room, Harry bit his lip to avoid chuckling; it appeared that neither of his sisters had made it to bed the past evening, albeit for entirely different reasons. But while Rose had fallen asleep staring out the window, Jasmine's pose was something straight out of his memories of Hermione: face down on a desk with a quill still in hand. Carefully taking the quill away and laying it on her desk, Harry repeated what he'd done for Rose and hovered Jasmine over to her bed before wandering back over to the desk. While he recognized it was an invasion of his sister's privacy, he was curious: who on Earth was so important that she couldn't wait till morning to finish a letter to?

Hermione, it turned out. Not only was the desk practically covered in letters in her familiar scrawl, but Jasmine had fallen asleep in the middle of a new letter to his friend. Huh. So they were more closely acquainted than just one meeting. The possibility of his dream being prophetic was starting to seem more likely by the day... and Harry had to remind himself that there were worse things that could happen than his friend hooking up with one of his sisters. Hermione ending up with another Ron boy, Jasmine or Rose - or both - with Ron-esque boy, et cetera...

Deciding to leave the twins to sleep - at least for now - Harry made his way out of Jasmine's room and, bypassing both Dora's room and the master bedroom, headed downstairs to get things going in the kitchen. After making detours to get fires going in both the transit fireplace and the ones used purely for heat, Harry opened the fridge and began pulling out the ingredients he'd need for the breakfast he had planned. Just for a change of pace, he'd decided to go with something he hadn't yet served his family but he knew at least his parents would be familiar with: a Scotch breakfast as routinely served by Madam Rosmerta up at the Three Broomsticks. Hopefully the full Scottish - poached eggs, sautéed mushrooms, Hog's pudding, Lorne sausage, bacon, potato scones, and thick slices of whole grain toast - would go over better with the twins than his attempts at local breakfast cuisine had. Harry shrugged. Ehh. If they didn't, more for him and Dora.

The first sign of another conscious person in the house came nearly half an hour later when a thump and the scrape of a stool's legs against the floor heralded the arrival of his mother as she stumbled into the kitchen, flopping onto one of the stools that sat at the kitchen island. "Coffee..." Harry rolled his eyes and snickered, but dutifully poured a mug for his mother and handed it to her. "Thank you, sweetie."

"If your original son hadn't spent a decade and change freeloading, I'd be talking about charging for this kind of service, you know." Harry flicked his wand, amused to see that his mother still instinctively opened her mouth to chastise him before shutting it, and levitated the platters of prepared food through the kitchen and into the breakfast nook. "Are Dad, Dora, and the twins coming down or are we starting without them?"

Shrugging, Lily pulled out her wand and tapped her throat before turning her away from him. "James!" Harry winced, clapping his hands over his ears as his mother's supercharged voice boomed through the house. "Get down here now and eat some breakfast or I'll let the kids eat it all!"

Harry groaned and threw himself into the chair beside his mother, poking her in the ribs with his wand before putting it away. "Thanks, Mum. I couldn't have done that myself." A moment later, his father came stumbling down the hall half-asleep, his sisters stuck behind his staggering form with Dora bringing up the rear. James easily entered the kitchen but a two Potter pile-up occurred as Jasmine and Rose ran into an invisible wall that he'd set up earlier using a weaker variation of the infamous Age Line, mostly to keep the girls from sneaking in and picking at the food before it was done and set out for the family. As Dora chuckled and stepped over the twins so she could pass through the barrier, Harry gave his mother a sheepish smile. "Oops. I should probably take that down, huh?"

"You shouldn't be doing it at all, Harry." Sighing in annoyance, James pulled his wand out of the waistband of his sleep pants and turned so he could cancel Harry's spell, allowing the twins to pass through the kitchen and on to where breakfast was waiting. "Just because you've discovered the flaw in the magical detection grid that some purebloods take advantage of doesn't mean you should be ignoring the rules against underage magic. Lily, I'm surprised you haven't reigned him in."

Lily's grip around the handle of her coffee mug tightened as she moved from the stool she was sitting on to a seat at the table. "Yes, because we both know I'm the only adult in this household. Now that I know about the loophole and how easy it is for purebloods to get around something I had to work hard to avoid being held back by, I really can't find it in me to give a damn." James opened his mouth to protest but Lily waved him off, setting her cup down and getting to work assembling a plate for herself. "You want him punished, either do it yourself or tell Hopkirk's people."

Coughing loudly to get his parents' attention as he delivered the bottles of milk and juice that the younger half of the house preferred with breakfast, Harry set his cargo down before wagging his finger. "If you children don't simmer down right this instant, I swear to God I will turn this car around." Lily burst into laughter, putting down her

fork to avoid flinging food by accident, even as her husband just stared at Harry in utter confusion. "Do we really need to do this now? It's Christmas. Eat breakfast now, and we can sign you up for couples' therapy later."

"Maybe I do need to start getting more involved with the discipline around here." James leaned forward and pointed a finger across the table at Harry. "I don't know what gives you the idea that you can talk to me like that, young man, but I am your father and..."

"Silencio." James's mouth continued to move soundlessly for a few moments before what had happened sunk in and he turned to glare at a rather nonplussed Lily. "Nice of you to finally remember that, James. But Harry's right. Let's enjoy Christmas like the family we're supposed to be and you and I can talk things over tonight after the children go to bed." Lily returned to her breakfast, a mushroom halfway to her mouth when James pounded a fist against the table before pointing to his throat. "You don't need to talk to eat. Behave yourself and I'll take it off when Remus and Sirius get here. Maybe."

James continued to scowl even as he picked up his fork and began serving himself breakfast; evidently he wasn't mad enough at Harry to pass up the food that he'd prepared. While Dora was too busy inhaling food and coffee to care about the adults' problems, the twins looked shocked at witnessing their parents' bickering and so Harry decided to jump in to distract them from the pair's marital discord. "By the way, you two are on dish duty this morning."

Rose pouted, looking to her mother for help before turning back to Harry. "Me? What did I do to deserve that? And you're not the boss of us anyways!"

"I had to come put both of you in bed this morning so you wouldn't wake up aching from sleeping in weird positions. And Jasmine, you're lucky you didn't end up drawing on your face in your sleep." Harry gestured over at the heaping pile of pots and pans in the sink. "It means you two owe me and since mom and I cook for you all the time and she does the dishes most days, you can do them once for her."

Lily grinned and raised her mug in approval. "And I'm the boss of you two and I heartily endorse this idea. No chores, at least for the morning? Happy Christmas to me!"

An hour later, breakfast was gone, the twins had grumbled their way through most of the cleaning, James had regained his voice, and the family adjourned to the living room to open presents. Almost right on cue, the fireplace flared green and the Blacks came piling out, followed by Remus. There was a bit of laughter as poor Cassie came rocketing out like a brown-haired torpedo, mowing down Harry and sending them to the floor in a tangle of limbs. The blushing pair got themselves sorted out in short order and James and Sirius began passing out presents to their proper recipients as the extended family settled in around the Christmas tree.

Harry's first present was a fairly sizable stack of books, courtesy of his mother. Checking the spines, Harry discovered they were the books he'd left sitting in his room after emptying his mother's school trunk: his textbooks for the next six years of Hogwarts - save any electives he might choose to take that she hadn't - charmed and restored back into pristine condition for him. Their eyes met and she pantomimed opening a book, so he did, finding a piece of faded parchment inside the cover of the top book. Eyes widening, he looked back up at Lily, who mouthed 'later'. His mother had just given him the Marauder's Map. That was going to be one interesting conversation later.

From his father, who couldn't manage to put on a polite façade for company and simply sat there stoically as his children unwrapped their presents, he received brand new quidditch pads to use instead of the battered ones the school loaned out to students who didn't have their own. Harry raised an eyebrow at the odd look of them; they weren't anywhere near as big as the goalkeeper gear turned keeper pads that Hermione wore, but they weren't as slim as the ones he was used to either. Lily correctly interpreted his expression, though, and was willing to offer an explanation since his father clearly wasn't. "They're based on what we learned while making your friend's keeper pads. Sleeker, obviously, since you need to be a lot faster than Hermione does. Then we added dragonhide over the carved foam and did the cosmetic work. I wasn't sure what to put on the helmet; I wasn't going to put a lioness like Hermione for obvious reasons but I thought a lion might open you two up to teasing because... well, lion, lioness... I'm sure you get what I mean." Harry nodded, lifting the item in question out of the box and eyeing it. "So I ended up going with a griffin instead. If you don't like

it, we can change it before you head back to school. They're not as sturdy as your friend's pads, obviously, but they're better than what anyone else at Hogwarts has according to your father."

"No, I like it. Thanks, Dad. And you too, Mum." Given the complexity of both presents - and the hidden extra present inside his mother's - Harry didn't expect to receive anything else from them and therefore wasn't disappointed when he received a single book from 'Father Christmas' and nothing else from his parents. Besides, he had a pile of gifts upstairs with his friends' names on them and knew he'd be getting at least a little something back from each of them as they exchanged gifts over the next few days.

He'd forgotten about the other four adults in the room, though. "Alright, Harry m'boy. Even though I helped a little with your pads, your parents wouldn't let me put my name on the tag, so I had to come up with a separate present for you. So... after a lot of debate, I came up with the perfect present for you." Pulling out his wand, Sirius gave it a grand wave and wrapping paper exploded from the end, twisting and wiggling with a life of its own as it surrounded Cassie and bound her, followed by a bright red and gold ribbon to complete the look. "Happy Christmas!"

Cassie wriggled inside the wrapping paper, failing to free herself but succeeding in tipping herself over onto Harry's lap. "Dad!"

Wincing under the dual glares from his wife and daughter, Sirius sighed and vanished the ribbon and paper. "Oh come on, we all know she has a ridiculously strong crush on him. It was funny." Anastasiya just kept glaring at him and Sirius winced. "I'm going to be sleeping on the sofa again tonight, aren't I?" She nodded. "Bugger." Turning his attention back to Harry, Sirius smiled sheepishly. "No, actually, your present isn't here. My old bat of a mother croaked a few years back and so I can finally get into the family home. We had a pretty extensive library and since you seem intent on turning into your Uncle Remus... I might as well let you grab some good books. Better stuff in the library at Grimmauld Place than you'll find in any of your schoolbooks, I assure you."

"Sirius Black! You are not going to let my son go taking books from your nightmare of a family! Dark wizards, the lot of them! Who knows what he could end up bringing home?"

"Oh come on, Lily! I came out of that house and I turned out alright. Besides, I'll make sure it's nothing too bad. They actually use some of the same books in auror training these days. There's no harm in letting Harry learn to recognize dark magic and how to counter it."

"You are most certainly not 'alright' if you think I'm letting my son near that filth. You're a father. You should know better! Would you want Cassie near those kinds of books?"

Harry followed the conversation back and forth like a spectator at a tennis match, only stopping when a hand tapped him on the shoulder. Looking back, he found Remus grinning at him and holding out a hastily wrapped present. "It's not quidditch pads, six years worth of school books, or a trip to Grimmauld Place, but I hope you like it."

Unwrapping it, Harry found a small box and inside was... a pocket watch? Perfect. Now he could return the one he'd been using as of late, which was especially nice considering his declining respect for his father. There was something odd about the inside of the lid, though: a series of tiny crystals and runes formed an array that even he was unfamiliar with. "What's this?"

"That... is the result of many years of tinkering that started after I learned a curious little fact back in my days as a prefect. Each professor carries a small piece of jewelry with them, usually a ring or necklace, that connects them to the castle and lets them give or take points. As prefects, your mother and I were issued badges with a modified version of that same charm that let us take points from our housemates as discipline. Anyways, I found a way to send out tiny pulses of magic that would resonate with the jewelry... like a bat's echolocation." Remus took the pocket watch from Harry, closing the lid and letting it rest face up on his palm. "I solemnly swear that I am up to no good."

Magic pulsed and flickered in midair about a foot above Remus's hand, cycling through a few indistinct and ghostly images that were vaguely humanoid. "Hmm. It tested perfectly in Hogsmeade. I guess Cornwall must be a bit too far out for the spells to work right. At any rate, when you get back to school it'll show you if a professor, the headmaster, one of the prefects, or either of the heads is nearby, along with exactly how far away they are and in what direction." The

ghostly figures flickered by again and Remus looked down at the watch. "Mischief managed."

Harry took the pocket watch eagerly and tucked it into his pocket. "Thanks, Uncle Remus! This is going to make it a lot easier to track down teachers after class if I have questions about assignments." Remus gave him an uncertain smile as Sirius and James groaned, which was exactly what Harry wanted. He now had a method of tracking the professors in addition to the Marauder's Map. If he could find the Cloak of Invisibility, he'd be in business when he got back to school...

"Do you swear that you will protect any secret shared with you by Harry James Potter regarding his origin or abilities unless explicitly told otherwise?"

"I do."

"Do you swear that you will protect any information regarding Harry James Potter's origin or abilities that you discover for yourself unless explicitly told otherwise?"

"I do."

"Do you swear to never use your metamorphmagus abilities to turn your hair Chudley Cannons orange?"

"I do. Sweet Merlin, why would I ever want to... that has got to be the ugliest color on Earth." Dora shuddered, her red and green bob bleeding a sickly looking grey at the thought before rebounding to display Christmas spirit again. Releasing Harry's hand, the metamorphmagus looked between him and Lily in confusion. "Now what's this all about? And why did we have to wait until the middle of the night and sneak outside to do it?"

Harry looked at his mother but since this was his show, she raised her hands in surrender and took a step back. "Right then. When I left in August, I remember you mentioning that your trainers had told you that anyone who learned how to cast a patronus before the end of second year would have first pick of job shadowing in their third." Dora nodded. "Let me guess... you're not part of that group of lucky people yet?"

After looking from Harry to Lily and back in confusion, Dora shrugged and nodded. "Yeah. And? You needed an Unbreakable Vow before you could ask me if I was still pants at casting a spell that most active aurors can't manage to cast properly?"

"Expecto patronum!" Harry held his wand steady as the massive burst of silvery-white light erupted from the end, eventually forming into the same massive basilisk that had been haunting his thoughts since he'd tried casting the spell back in August. Now wasn't the time to fall into introspection about why his patronus had changed to take on that particular form, though, and so instead Harry did his best to look confident as he sent a smile Dora's way. "Want a bit of tutoring?"

Letting out a low whistle, Dora nodded, staring at the oversized patronus as her hair slowly bled to a matching silvery-white shade and - much to Harry's surprise - even began to glow a bit. "You know, I should have known something was up when you suddenly discovered how books worked..."

"Constant vigilance!"

"...funny..."

Harry was curled up in a chair in the living room with one of the books his mother had restored for him, reading her thoughts on how mental clarity and willpower affected the summoning of objects, when a crack alerted him to Lily's return. Peering over the top of his book, he raised an eyebrow at the sight that greeted him. When neither of the new arrivals moved after several seconds, he cleared his throat. "I think you can let go of my mum now, Hermione. You've gone past friendly hug and into 'Dad might start getting jealous' territory."

Jerking away from the older woman, Hermione paused, scowled, and then crossed the room to smack Harry upside the head before flopping into the chair beside him. "Oh shut up. I was holding on to her because apparition makes my head spin and it was either that or fall over."

That earned her a snort of disbelief from Harry and he leaned in, lowering his voice so his mother wouldn't overhear their exchange. "And your hands just so happen to rest on the small of someone's back when they apparate you?"

"Shut. Up. Harry." Shooting him the evil eye, Hermione glanced over at Lily and then angled her body so she could offer Harry a two-fingered salute without the redhead seeing. It didn't go as unnoticed as Hermione was hoping but Lily opted not to say anything, pointing upward, flashing Harry three fingers, and then disappearing with a pop. "Seriously, though, I hate apparating. Please tell me that's not how we're planning to get to King's Cross on the 5th?"

Actually, Harry wasn't entirely sure on that front. He wasn't sure his parents knew, either, given that James was working and Lily could only side-along one of them at a time. Two trips? Or was she counting on Harry to maybe apparate himself in a faux side-along while she took Hermione? "Not sure. She might try and get a portkey through my father or a friend at the Ministry. Maybe. Or we could floo straight to the platform. Apparition would be complicated, so it's down there with driving and taking a muggle train to London as far as likeliness." Tilting his head to one side, he pondered that. "Actually, knowing Mum's thing for trains... that's more likely than apparating."

"Oh, thank the Lord." Hermione leaned back in her seat and relaxed, eyes drifting closed for a moment. "So, get anything good for Christmas?"

Harry shrugged and leaned over, retrieving his book and holding it up for her to see. "Some books from Mum... some books from Sirius... a wicked pocket watch from Remus... some quidditch pads that match yours that were a joint project between Mum, Dad, and Sirius... marriage contract offers from four girls. Although I don't know if it counts as four or three, since two of the girls come as a package..."

Nodding along absently, Hermione's eyes went wide at the last bit and Harry knew he had her full attention. "Wait, what? You lot seriously still use marriage contracts? I mean, I know Daphne's mentioned them a few times but I never asked for details and so I thought it was a joke or something. One of those pureblood things

where I just nod, smile, and pretend I get why you lot are laughing at something stupid sounding."

"Not all of us do. My grandparents were pretty modern and so they turned away all the requests that came in so Dad could meet someone on his own and marry for love. Some of the old-fashioned pureblood families still use them, though. Two of the three offers I have are from those families. The last one... I didn't think the Lovegoods were like that, but I guess so."

Hermione bit her lip but eventually couldn't contain her laughter and it bubbled out in a few bursts of giggling. "The Lovegoods? There's seriously a family named the Lovegoods?" Harry nodded. "Wow. I'm not even going to make a joke there because it's too bloody easy."

That it was. Well, at least Harry assumed Hermione was thinking of the provocatively named damsels of Ian Fleming's books like he was. Lord knew he'd made plenty of jokes in that vein to Luna's face after they'd started dating. Shaking his head, Harry pushed the past away and decided to get the conversation back on track. "Not that I know much about them other than what my mum's told me. The daughter's name is Luna and she's my sisters' age. Her father is Oddment Lovegood, publisher of The Quibbler, and her mother does charms and defensive magic experiments. Neither struck my mum as the traditional type, but obviously they are."

"Not that it matters. I mean, it's not like you're even thinking about taking any of these girls up on their offers, right?" Hermione waited a beat and when Harry didn't respond fast enough for her tastes, sat up and glared at him. "Harry Potter! Arranged marriages are a barbaric and antiquated concept! How could you possibly even consider such a thing?"

Harry shrugged. "Well, I'm waiting until I have a chance to see what their mothers and grandmothers look like. See what the future might be like and decide if I want to invest while I can..."

Thankfully Hermione's righteous anger over the notion of women as saleable property kept her from realizing that Harry should be a bit on the young side to appreciate women in a blatantly sexual way and she leaned over, slapping him hard upside the head. Then she paused, thought for a moment longer, and slapped him again. "No. Bad Harry. We don't objectify our women. We respect our women."

She then delivered a third slap, just for good measure.

Harry was rescued from further abuse by a redheaded rocket that attacked Hermione, hugging her tight before backing away and blushing. "Hermione! You're here!" Jasmine bounced on her toes, tossing a quaffle from one hand to the other as her eyes bounced back and forth between Hermione and the back door. "C'mon! I can show you our pitch!"

"Erm..." Hermione looked over at Harry, who gave her a little shrug. Not that he wasn't glad to have her there, but he was used to Hermione spending most of her time with Su while they were at school. He wasn't going to complain if she spent a bit of time with his sister. She'd be there non-stop for the next ten days; there'd be plenty of time to talk to her later, after Jasmine tired herself out. "Well, if Harry doesn't care, I suppose it sounds like fun. My broom is shrunken in one of my bags along with my pads... although I reckon I don't need those, since we won't be using bludgers."

Pulling out his wand, Harry restored Hermione's broom to full size and let Jasmine drag the protesting brunette off; he knew she'd be on him about his underage magic use later but for now, Hurricane Jasmine would keep her occupied. Ducking into the hall, Harry headed up the stairs in search of his mother. Guessing from her signal upon departing had meant she'd be in the attic, he headed all the way up and found her knee deep in boxes of who knew what. "Mum? I think I'm going to head over to the Lovegoods' home for a bit."

Lily looked up, a concerned expression on her face. "Is everything okay? I just got back with your friend. Why aren't you spending time with her?"

"Jasmine stole her."

"Ah." Moving to the end of the attic, Lily peered out the window. Harry joined her, watching as Jasmine led Hermione out onto the pitch. Hermione was the first to take to the air on her school-bought Nimbus 2001, with Jasmine following on... Harry narrowed his eyes. Was that his broom? Not that he needed it at the moment, but asking would have been nice. He made a note to have a word with her when he got back. "It's not a problem, is it? Jasmine's just

excited to have someone to play with who's a decent keeper. She really wants to make the house team when she gets to Hogwarts and this would be good practice. Hermione did amazingly last game."

As he watched Jasmine throw the quaffle at Hermione, looping around behind the rings as the brunette caught it and lingering to stare at his friend, Harry waited for his mother to put two and two together. As the silence stretched on and on, he finally decided to give her a little nudge to see what she thought of his suspicions. "She's chasing, but I don't think it has anything to do with quidditch." Lily looked over at him oddly. "Just out of curiosity, Mum, when did Jasmine start on her little quidditch princess kick? Say... around the time she first met the lovely Miss Granger?"

Lily turned her attention back to the two girls flitting around the pitch for a moment and then her eyes widened. "No..."

"She's Cassie's age, so it's not that out there, is it? I mean, Cassie has been crushing on me for a while now. I know one when I see one and Jasmine definitely reminds me of Cassie with red hair and a broomstick right now." Patting his stupefied mother on the back, Harry grinned. "But my little sister's crushes aren't any of my business. Can I go take my present over to Luna? I sent a letter off last night asking when it'd be best for me to drop by and discuss the contract offer on Dad's behalf and they said any time this afternoon was fine." Lily nodded absently and Harry waited a moment to see if she'd speak before turning and walking away. Down the rickety stairs from the attic, into his room to grab a present, and then down two more flights of stairs to the ground floor. Taking a pinch of floo powder, he tossed it into the fire and watched it burn green for a moment before stepping in. "The Rookery!"

Floo travel was a method of wizarding transportation that, no matter how old or powerful he became, Harry still detested. Mostly because after all this time, he was still pants at sticking the landing. Reaching his destination, Harry dropped to his knees as he came skidding out of the fire, unable to emerge in an entirely controlled manner but not wanting to come out flying like a rogue bludger. Light tinkling laughter greeted his arrival, and Harry looked up to lay eyes on Luna Lovegood for the first time in this universe. "Hullo, Harry Potter."

Joe's Note: Just want to repeat that I'm always looking for Brits to offer real Britpicking services as well as Mandarin speakers so I don't need to rely strictly on Google Translate. Oh, and Su was eliminated from this chapter because I told y'all when she'd be back... and that's at a point after Boxing Day. For those who are curious, Feng Sushi is a real London sushi restaurant chain, and Pret A Manger has over a hundred locations in London alone to offer sandwiches, salads, wraps, and other healthy portable foods to the masses - up to and including sushi, but they're better known for their Western fare. And of course you all know what McDonald's is.

"Hullo, Harry Potter."

Looking Luna up and down slowly, Harry released a barely audible sigh as he smiled and waved at her. Despite dreams that showed a future appearance that was drastically different from what he was used to, her younger self - unlike some people he'd met in this world - looked exactly the same as he was used to, right down to the wand tucked behind her ear and pale blonde hair. Pale blonde hair. It was nice to finally have the answer to a question that had been bothering him since he'd begun seeing Luna in his dreams, Harry mused: why was her hair one color in dreams where she was a Ravenclaw or Gryffindor and another when she was a Slytherin? By eleven years of age, one's hair color was set and so how could her sorting possibly affect it?

Now everything made sense. Luna was just as blonde here as she'd been in his home universe. She would more than likely - he hadn't, after all, seen into his seventh year or beyond yet in any of his dreams - remain that color if she was a Ravenclaw or Gryffindor, whereas something about being sorted into Slytherin would inspire her to indulge in a darker look. Whether, however, it was that being a member of the house of snakes that caused her to change looks or that being in Slytherin made some second event more likely to occur and influence her was still a mystery. As was which house she would actually be sorted into, Harry noted. A mystery that wouldn't be solved until nine months from now, he reminded himself. And so, forcing away thoughts of the future to instead focus on the present, Harry struggled to his feet and brushed himself off. "Are you Luna Lovegood, then?"

Shaking her head, the blonde pointed over at the doorway. "Not me. I'm her twin sister Soleil. Soleil Shagwell. She's the older twin and so she has Daddy's last name, while I have our Mummy's old one. It was part of their pre-nup. Well, it said first child and second child but if you want to be literal, that's what we are." Her mother's name was Selene according to what his mother had told him. Her maiden name was Shagwell. Good God, Luna's mom was the author of *Snogging Seductresses*? The hot blonde woman who had appeared in a few of his dreams, when he wasn't busy dreaming about Reese, Cissy, or the future? Well that was exceedingly... awkward. "Anyways, Luna's still upstairs prettying herself up for you. She's really been looking forward to meeting you." Harry looked over at where Soleil was pointing and waited... and waited... and waited. When he heard another round of soft giggles, he knew he'd been had. "Oh, I haven't had that much fun since I made Rita Skeeter's purse 'accidentally' catch on fire once. No, Harry, I'm Luna. Why? Is something wrong with me? Is that why you were so eager to meet my 'sister'?"

Oh, that was dangerous territory and Harry knew it. It was like when Luna asked him if a certain pair of robes made her look fat, or if the muggle jeans she'd bought during a day trip to London made her arse look big. He was well trained by now: any appearance-related question from a woman was to be answered with as many lies as necessary to preserve one's manhood.

The problem was, Luna was spectacularly good at telling when he was lying... or at least the one he was used to dealing with was. And if her looks were anything to go by, this Luna wasn't too different from the one he had been oh so briefly engaged to. Actually that wasn't entirely accurate, he was forced to admit after a second, more thorough inspection of the girl. This Luna's clothes were better coordinated than anything he'd seen on his Luna, save for a few formal occasions where she made a conscious effort to dress herself nicely. Her outfit was mostly shades of green, from an emerald green jumper to a darker green shirt beneath and an ankle-length skirt that matched her jumper, with one red sock and one blue peeking out from beneath her skirt. Mostly green with a little red and blue. Was this the universe's way of communicating that yes, there was some validity to his dreams and that he should start putting some trust in them?

Or was she just in the Christmas spirit, and had pulled on one blue sock after realizing she'd lost one of her red ones?

Luna coughed and Harry blushed as he realized that he'd probably been standing there doing a fair impression of Crabbe for at least a minute. "Erm, there's nothing wrong with you, Luna. But I do know a few pairs of actual twins. My younger sisters are twins, for one, and then at school there are the Patils, the Carrows, and the Weasleys. Out of all of them, the Weasleys are the only ones who seem to enjoy it when you mix up which twin you're talking to. I didn't want to get off on the wrong foot with someone whose parents had sent me a marriage contract offer. Seems like I managed that anyways, though."

"You have a left foot and a right foot, Harry. You have no wrong foot to get off on... and I'm not entirely sure what you'd be getting off of, even if you did." Luna considered that for a moment longer before shrugging and rising from the chair she'd been occupying while waiting for him. "Anyways, I think we have more important things to discuss."

Blinking, Harry looked around in search of Oddment Lovegood's distinctive shock of pale blonde hair, rather reminiscent of the pictures of Albert Einstein he'd seen in primary school. "We do? Not that I think you're property or don't matter in this situation, Luna, but isn't the negotiation generally between either the two fathers or the bride-to-be's father and the prospective husband?"

Luna just waved her hand dismissively before grabbing his, leading him from the kitchen to the living room, where a plate of biscuits and some milk was waiting for them on a table in front of a sofa that appeared to have been tie-dyed at some point. "It'd be a bit awkward for you to meet with my father, considering he doesn't know what he signed for me was what it was."

"Wait a minute... what?"

Sighing, Luna rolled her eyes as she forced Harry to sit down on the sofa, taking a seat next to him. "Honestly, Harry, it's not like you've never lied to your parents. I didn't think they'd agree with what I wanted to do so I waited until Daddy was busy working on The Quibbler and then plopped an official looking piece of parchment on his desk and told him it was something Mummy needed signed for

Gringotts. He didn't even blink before signing on the line and voila, one marriage contract offer, ready to send out. We use owls to deliver issues of The Quibbler to subscribers each month, so all I had to do was wait until they got back from a delivery run to make sure Daddy wouldn't miss one and then I sent it off to your house."

Harry tried to wrap his brain around that one. A ten-year-old girl was conspiring to marry him and tricking her father into going along with it. It boggled the mind, even for someone used to dealing with Luna. Wanting to buy himself some more time, he held out the present he'd bought for her. "I got you something for Christmas."

"Oh! Thank you! I didn't get you anything... although you thought I was trying to give you myself, which should have been enough of a present, hmm?" Luna took the wrapped book from him and carefully removed the ribbon followed by the wrapping paper, laying each on the table and smoothing them out before examining her new possession. "On Writing Well: The Classic Guide to Writing Nonfiction. A twenty-fifth anniversary edition and more than one million copies sold? I think that's more books than Flourish & Blotts has sold since I was born..." The blonde opened the book and flipped through the pages quickly before looking up at Harry and offering a wide smile. "There are even separate chapters for writing interviews and travel articles. I can't wait to read this and try it out. Thank you!"

Taking a biscuit from the plate in front of him, Harry waved off the thanks. "Well, I asked my mum what she knew about your parents. She said your mum does a lot of experimental magic and your dad owned The Quibbler. If you took after your mum, I was out of luck because she probably has more magic books than Diagon Alley and there'd be no way for me to find something to give you. So I decided to gamble and hope you were more interested in your dad's job, and got you that from a muggle bookstore near the Leaky Cauldron."

Interest turning back to her new book, Luna flipped from page to page rapidly. "Well, you still didn't have to and you did anyways. So thank you. Hmm." Looking back up from On Writing Well, Luna stared at him intently. "Your father is an auror captain and your mother is brill at charms. Did you take after either of them? Or do you have your own favorite subject now that you're at Hogwarts?"

Harry thought about that. Defense Against the Dark Arts was by and far his favorite, even if he was languishing under the incompetent Quirrell this year. With Selene's connections to that field of magic, though, who knew what books Luna might be able to get her hands on for him? He might finally even see something new. "Defense Against the Dark Arts. The professor isn't very good but the book is fascinating."

"Ah. Well then I hope the headmaster finds a better teacher for us before I get there next year." Oh, he wouldn't be. Not that Harry could tell her as much, seeing as how the hiring of next year's Defense professor was still months away. "Still... Melvil? The Dark Arts Outsmarted, please." Harry turned and watched as the bookshelf shuddered, an arm emerging from the side and grabbing one book off the middle shelf, tossing it through the air to Luna. At just the right moment, the blonde's hand shot up and she snagged the book out of midair. "Thank you, Melvil." The bookshelf offered her a thumbs up before the arm retracted back into the side, disappearing from view. Something bumped against his ribs and Harry looked down to find Luna poking him with the book. "Here. This will keep you busy while I read the section on interviews. It's not a present, though; I'll need to do something about that after you leave..."

"Really, you don't need to get me anything, Luna. I just thought..."

"Shush, reading."

Harry looked from the book to Luna and back. Not that he minded the idea of doing a little pleasure reading - he was familiar with The Dark Arts Outsmarted from when he'd led the DA but had never read the book all the way through - he was there for a purpose. "Erm, no offense, but can't you read it after we've taken care of the marriage contract offer business? I mean, it's Boxing Day and I have a friend over who I should go rescue from my little sisters..."

Sighing loudly, Luna closed her new book and set it down on the coffee table. "Fine. Melvil, can I have the interview kit please?" There was a whoosh of air behind them and then Luna brought her hand forward with a wooden box in it, setting it down between the plate of biscuits and On Writing Well and opening it so she could withdraw a piece of parchment and a Quick-Quotes Quill. Harry gave it an odd look and Luna raised an eyebrow at him. "You didn't

think I actually wanted to marry you, did you? I'm only ten, Harry. And we've never even met before."

Harry groaned, rubbing his temples. Here he was, eighteen years old, and yet he was being repeatedly outsmarted by a preteen version of Luna Lovegood. He was deeply, deeply ashamed of himself. "Alright. So if you're not actually interested in marrying me, why send the letter? You're not the only person who sent me one, you know, and so yes, I did think that you were serious."

"Oh. No, I'm definitely not Sirius. He's your father's friend." Wow. Now Harry knew how Professor McGonagall had felt when he'd dropped that one on her. That was a really stupid pun. Luna fiddled with the emerald green Quick-Quotes Quill for a moment before leaning back. "So, there were other girls sent you marriage contracts? How many and from who?"

After eyeing the quill for a moment, Harry figured there was no harm in answering. After all, copies of all contracts sent were archived at the Ministry of Magic and she could find the answer there if he was unwilling to part with it. "The House of Greengrass sent an offer for Daphne's hand and there was another from Ancaeus Carrow for both Flora and Hestia Carrow." The quill scribbled something onto the parchment and his gaze bounced from it to Luna and back. "I'm very, very confused."

Luna took one of the biscuits, nibbling on it while eyeing him like a particularly bizarre animal she'd write about for her father's magazine. "Hmm. Mummy was right. Boys really do need to have everything explained to them if you want them to keep up." Ouch. Misandrist preteen Luna. That certainly boded ill for his chances of befriending her in the future. "Do you happen to remember what my Daddy does for a living, Harry Potter?"

"We've covered this a few times, haven't we? He publishes The Quibbler."

"Just checking, Harry. Mummy's always told me that it's better to underestimate boys than to give them too much credit and end up disappointed and repeating things with smaller words. Anyways, I want to work for him as a reporter when I grow up. But he doesn't take me seriously yet." More than likely due to the fact that she was only ten bloody years old, but Harry was wise enough to keep that to

himself. "So I decided I'd get an interview with the boy who saved the Hogwarts Sammhuinn festivities from three trolls." Luna reached into her wooden box and pulled out a stack of sheets of parchment, spreading them out on her lap so Harry could see the dense black writing that covered each page. "But for regular interviews, there's paperwork and money sometimes and all sorts of other things I didn't want to deal with. Not to mention that your parents would have to sign things for you, and I bet they're not nearly as easy to trick as my father is. So I decided to try luring you in with the marriage contract. Even if your father came to see my father, I was betting you'd come to see who I was and I could get a quick chat in before everything got sorted out. Like how you can catch a person coming out of a meeting at the Ministry or a gathering of the Wizengamot, ask a few questions, and print anything they let slip. I didn't think it'd actually work but... well, here you are."

And here he was. Her plan was convoluted, far beyond what most ten-year-olds were capable of... and utterly brilliant. Harry shook his head and revised his estimation of this Luna upward another notch or two; she would most definitely bear watching and active courting, as a friend if nothing more. She was like Hermione on acid: a fearsome combination of brilliance and non-linear thinking that had the potential to shatter boundaries and tear away the rules of magic that the wizarding world clung to... if her mind was properly nourished. Harry leaned back against a pillow that wriggled and patted his shoulders at it moved into a position most comfortable for him. "So let me get this straight, just to make sure we're on the same page here. You don't want to marry me, you just want to interview me?"

Groaning, Luna rested her head in her hands. "Now I know why Mummy says she's the brains of this operation. Even smart boys are still pretty thick."

"Hey!"

"Moving on to the next question... is it true that Professor Quirinus Quirrell was somehow involved in the trolls being set upon the festival goers and that was why you ordered your mother to stun Quirrell for you while you dealt with the trolls?" Luna's question made his eyes widened but the blonde just shrugged innocently at him. "I told you that I have sources at Hogwarts, Harry. Now answer

the question, please. Quirrell: was he or was he not behind the attack on Samhuinn?"

Harry held his hands up in surrender. "I plead the Fifth?" Oh wait. He was a pureblood-raised half-blood. He wasn't supposed to know anything about America outside of that it was where 'Yanks' were and that Salem had a school there that accepted all kinds of 'riff-raff', also known as students who weren't pureblooded practically to the point of being inbred.

Thankfully Luna seemed more focused on tearing his argument apart than figuring out how he could make said argument, crossing her arms over her chest and narrowing her eyes at him. "You're not American, Harry. You're not protected by their Constitution."

"You're not American either!" Harry threw his hands up in the air, flopping back against the sofa. "How do you even know that reference?"

"I'm a girl. I know everything."

For the rest of the afternoon, Harry lounged in the living room with Luna and let her bombard him with questions about his family life, school life, the Gryffindor quidditch team and its two first year players, and the troll incident. After all, Harry knew it was only a matter of time before Dumbledore finally confronted him about what he'd done and if he released all the same information he was willing to tell the headmaster, it would keep Dumbledore from being able to try and use anything Harry revealed as leverage against him. Not that he had any reason to suspect the headmaster of having malevolent intentions towards him but at the same time, Harry was very aware that his Dumbledore had enjoyed having things go his way and hadn't been above taking advantage of opportunities presented to him to push things down the path he desired.

That, and Luna had put a lot of work into being able to get close enough to him to get a story. Why not reward her initiative?

At one point, a curvaceous blonde about the same age as his mother emerged from the floo and dusted off her Ravenclaw blue robes, entering the living room and spending a few minutes talking to them before disappearing upstairs. Harry assumed she was

Selene Lovegood née Shagwell, since the odds of yet another person he knew having an unconventional parental situation were extraordinarily low.

And good God did she ever fall into the 'fine wine' category of women who only got better with age; she was even prettier in person than she was in the dust jacket picture from Snogging Seductresses. Harry could definitely see where the Luna of his dreams would end up getting her looks from. Not that he minded in the least. Selene wasn't Narcissa, but the woman was definitely easy on the eyes. She'd had an odd reaction to hearing he was 'Lily Evans's son', though. Not 'James Potter's son' or 'the Potter boy'; she'd been solely curious about his mother. When he'd answered that Lily was indeed his mother, Selene had gotten an odd gleam in her eye and chuckled softly before excusing herself. Something to ask his mother about when he got home, he mused.

As the sun dwindled and dipped below the horizon, though, Harry realized poor Hermione was probably being run well and truly ragged by Jasmine and so he decided to take pity on his friend and return to the house. After watching Luna toss her copy of the marriage contract into the fire, the flames sparking purple and blue as the magical object was consumed, Harry made the promise to owl her before taking a pinch of floo powder and flicking it into the flames. "Potter Manor!"

After another twisting, gut-wrenching trip through the floo, Harry came flying out and rolled across the living room floor before coming to rest on his back, staring up at the ceiling. He really needed to figure out how adults - and even most other children - managed to emerge from the network in a dignified fashion. The laughter of several girls greeted his arrival and Harry turned his head, finding Hermione sitting on the two-seater with Daphne while Tara and Tracey occupied the matching sofa. "Hello Hermione. Hello people that aren't supposed to be in my house."

Hermione looked guilty for a moment before shrugging defensively. "Hey, you're the one who ran off and left me behind here with your sisters. Even I can only take so much quidditch and Rose ran out of questions about Hogwarts, so I called Daphne - and let me tell you, you people need a better way of making calls than sticking your head in a fireplace because that's just plain weird - and she and

Tracey came over. And if Tara doesn't have permission, take it up with Lady Malfoy. She's the one who brought her over."

"We were supposed to meet with Cassie here but evidently the Blacks made other plans and forgot to cancel the ones they had with Mum. Then our mums wandered off to talk about some new idea for Hogwarts." As he rolled over and climbed to his feet, Tara met Harry's gaze, looked pointedly upward, and then met his eyes again. Ah. So in other words, keep everyone downstairs in case the Silencing Charms didn't quite keep things silenced. Got it. And he really needed to talk to the two of them about their behavior; sneaking around in the middle of the night was one thing, but when the house was full of impressionable young minds was another thing entirely. "How was your afternoon with the Lovegoods? I thought you were going to wait until after my mother could give you some advice before handling any of the marriage contract offers?"

Cursing Tara's obliviousness - or desire to cause problems for him - Harry shot a glance over at where Daphne was mouthing the word 'offers' before taking a seat beside his cousin on the sofa. The blonde immediately moved to curl up against his side and after rolling his eyes, Harry wrapped one arm around her shoulders. Why she felt the need to be all over him, Harry had no idea but given who she'd been in his last life, it freaked him out to no end. Maybe that was why she did it? Now that he thought about it... it had only started after he'd told her his secret and she was generally only affectionate in public places where he couldn't put up a fuss without drawing unwanted attention to himself. Well. How positively... Slytherin... of her. "Turns out the offer was a trick. Makes me glad that Dad didn't go over, though, because the poor Lovegoods would have had no idea what was going on. Luna sent me the offer behind her parents' back as... well, bait for a trap. She just wanted to get me over to her house so she could interview me for The Quibbler, but didn't want to try and get actual interview request papers past my parents."

"But if you just so happened to drop by her house for some reason and answered a few questions she asked you... she wouldn't need to get your parents' approval." Daphne let out a low whistle of approval, perking up a bit at the news that her competition was evidently non-existent. "Bloody brilliant that is. Well at least you know she won't be headed for Gryffindor and you'll be safe from her at school next year."

Raising an eyebrow at that, Harry jerked a thumb in the direction of the girl Daphne was sharing the two-seater with. "Oh yes, because a fearsome intellect is definitely a sign that you're guaranteed to end up in Ravenclaw. Just out of curiosity, what color tie does Hermione here wear at school? And Su? And you're not exactly Crabbe or Goyle, Daphne." The strawberry blonde raised her hands in surrender at that, ceding the fight to Harry. "Besides, after today? I'd guess Slytherin over Ravenclaw. Slytherin for being sneaky enough to pull off her plan, Gryffindor in distant second for daring to take the plan and do it, Ravenclaw way back in third because the plan shows she has a mind but she's definitely more of a Slytherin or Gryffindor, and Hufflepuff... she'll end up a 'puff when Longbottom earns points from Snape."

A cough from the doorway made all five preteens look over at where Dora was standing, arms crossed over her chest and her hair a mass of yellow and black spikes. "What's wrong with being a Hufflepuff?"

"Absolutely nothing, Dora. I mean, as long as you don't mind sounding like a brand of marshmallow." That set the girls to laughing and Harry joined them as Dora scowled at him. "No, seriously, there's nothing wrong with being a 'puff. I was just saying that in the case of the girl we were talking about, it's really, really unlikely that she'll be sorted there. Anyways, what's the matter? I thought you would be hiding in your cave with all us 'ickle firsties' roaming the house."

Dora poked her stomach in response. "That was the plan, but I'm running on empty. I tried to find Aunt Lily or Aunt Narcissa but the two of them have up and disappeared again. Since you were her little kitchen helper this summer, I thought you might know what was going on for dinner tonight. If anything was going on. If not, I'm flooing to London to look for take-away."

Hmm. Well, given that he hadn't asked Lily about her plans for the day - nor had she volunteered them - before leaving for the Rookery, Harry had nothing to offer Dora. Except... "Sounds like a good idea. Have you seen the twins? If we can agree on a restaurant, I can pick out something for Mum, Tara can pick out something for her mother, and you can put Stasis Charms on them if the food gets back before they do."

"See, this is why we give you room and board, Harry. You're the man with the plan. Okay, the twins are in the sitting room reading. I'll go get the menu book and we can go from there." Turning around, Dora hurried out of the room and Harry shook his head in amusement. The fact that his cousin maintained a book with the menu of every magical restaurant in Britain and Ireland that offered take-away - along with select muggle eateries located near gateway locations like the Leaky Cauldron - definitely said something about his cousin.

What that was... Harry wasn't exactly sure.

Wiggling out from under Tara, the blonde flopping over as she was deprived of support, Harry left the girls behind as he wandered down the hall and into the sitting room. Pausing in the doorway, he bit his lip to avoid laughing as he took in his sisters: Jasmine had her nose buried in *Quidditch Through the Ages*, while Rose was busy devouring a copy of *Hogwarts, A History* that was almost as big as her torso. Whistling softly to get their attention, Harry jerked a thumb back over his shoulder. "We're doing dinner à la Dora. I figured you'd want to pick your own food instead of letting me do it for you."

Jasmine and Rose exchanged looks before shuddering. "Too right. You have gross taste in food." Harry scowled at Jasmine; it wasn't his fault that he had developed a slightly broader palette than them thanks to some of the stuff Luna had introduced him to during their relationship. So shoot him for having slightly more worldly and refined tastes than his ten-year-old sisters hap... "Maybe we can talk Dora into going to Feng Sushi?"

"Hmm. Meeting Box?"

"Meeting Box."

...eww. He would eat a lot of things - up to and including haggis - but raw fish on rice was not one of them. "You two have fun with that. If you somehow manage to talk everyone else into it, I'm putting in a separate order. And make sure Dora doesn't leave until I do; you know Aunt Narcissa doesn't like it either." The twins appeared to consider that for a moment before shrugging and Harry snorted as he began herding them towards where he could hear the others talking. They had a point. From entirely unwanted past experience,

Harry knew Feng Sushi's Meeting Box was enough to feed six to eight people. There were ten of them tonight. At least two people would be left out and so did it really matter that a minimum of two people didn't want to partake in food that wouldn't be available to them anyways?

Dropping the twins off in the kitchen where the others were pouring over Dora's extensive collection of take-away menus, Harry gave what he thought was a semi-believable sounding excuse in that he thought his mother might have left a note in his room while he was out and then ignored Tara's smirk as he headed up the stairs to the first floor and the master suite. Knocking on the door twice yielded no result and so Harry used a brute force finite to remove the bidirectional Silencing Charm before trying a third time. "Mum? Mother? You two aren't the only ones in this house who'd like to do some eating today. Dora's about to make a take-away run and if you don't want me picking out your food for you..."

There was a minute's worth of murmuring and shuffling and then the door opened a crack to reveal a rather tousled looking Lily. Harry just raised an eyebrow at the disgruntled look on her face and she sighed. "I suppose this is what we get for trying to squeeze in a little fun with a house full of kids. Have I mentioned yet that I'm looking forward to next September?"

"You know, if I was the one you were trying to toss out of the nest just so you could shag more often, I might be offended by that." Harry's dry retort made Lily blush before demonstrating a spectacular lack of maturity and sticking her tongue out at him. "Charming. Remind me again how - despite being just over half your age mentally and a third your age physically - I ended up as the mature, responsible one in this household?"

The door opened a bit more to reveal a Narcissa that, while a bit tousled looking, was at least fully dressed, unlike Lily who had only managed to find a dressing gown before answering the door. "Because unlike you, the two of us have realized that maturity is vastly overrated." As Harry tried to wrap his mind around that one, Narcissa gave Lily a quick kiss and then slipped past them both. "Get dressed, darling. I'll keep the kids from ordering anything truly disgusting."

Harry grimaced at the reminder of what his sisters were plotting. "Good luck with that. The twins are in the mood for sushi." Even as Lily perked up at the prospect, Narcissa shuddered. "Thank you. At least someone in this house is on my side." That sent Narcissa hurrying down the stairs with renewed purposes and Harry turned back to his mother. "Can I come in for a second?"

"I guess? I just wouldn't recommend sitting... anywhere, come to think of it." Harry looked around, noticing that the top of his mother's vanity had been swept clean, creating a cluttered mess on the surrounding floor. The dresser had been given the same treatment, and the less said about the bed the better. Absently, Harry waved his wand and cast a few Air Freshening Charms to cover up the overpowering odor left behind by Lily and Narcissa's afternoon romp. "So... is this about the blank parchment I gave you? I figured you would know all about the Mar..."

"...auder's Map? 'I solemnly swear I'm up to no good'? Yeah, I had it in my world. Dad and Sirius lost it to Filch while at school, Fred and George Weasley found it in his office, and then they gave it to me in my third year. Thanks, though. It'll be dead useful." How she'd ended up with it in this world was bound to be an interesting story; had she stolen it from Filch before graduating to keep it from making its way into the hands of a new generation of Marauders or had his father managed to keep it and she'd stolen it from his things only recently? Something to ask about later, he supposed. For now, he had something else on his mind. "So Selene Lovegood seemed really interested in 'Lily Evans's son' when we met today." Lily paled before abruptly turning as red as her hair and Harry realized he'd struck gold. "I don't suppose you can think of a reason she might have phrased things in that odd, very particular way, can you?"

Turning away, Lily wandered over to her dresser and began pulling out a fresh set of clothes. "I may or may not have dated Selene in my fifth year..."

Well, considering Selene obviously didn't mind kissing girls if her book was anything to go by, his mother definitely didn't mind kissing girls, and both acted oddly when it came to mentions of the other... "For some reason, I'm thinking 'may' is more likely. Because I've been wondering for months now... what, did you wake up one morning and think to yourself 'I need to make breakfast, do some laundry, pick up a few things at Diagon Alley, and then cheat on my

husband. Oh, and for no apparent reason, it should definitely be with with another woman.' But knowing there was a woman before Dad makes everything make a lot more sense to me."

"Uh... huh." Lily shot Harry an unreadable look. "You know, I'm not sure I like how much thought you're apparently putting into my sex life. It's a bit creepy, to be honest."

Harry rolled his eyes. "It was just idle curiosity, since in my world you never dated anyone other than Dad, much less another girl. Well, at least as far as I know." Lily continued to eye him oddly. "It was!" Her expression didn't change. "Okay, fine, you caught me. I'm secretly plotting to kill James, marry you, and then maybe someday have a daughter who's also my sister. We can turn it into a play and call it Oedipus Hex."

A long jean skirt joined the t-shirt, bra, and knickers his mother had placed on one mostly undisturbed corner of the bed, amusing Harry with how different her chosen outfit and Narcissa's dress were. Not that either choice surprised him, but they only served to highlight the differences in the women's heritage and worldviews. "Hmm. Still creepy, but you do earn points for the Sophocles pun."

Silence fell and then Lily cleared her throat, looking pointedly at the clothes on the bed before giving a little tug on the belt of her dressing gown: an emerald green peignoir that Harry suddenly realized covered uncomfortably little of his mother. "Right then. Out I go. Although I have to know... Selene Shagwell. Did she live up to the name at least?"

Harry barely avoided the Stinging Hex that came flying his way.

Having agreed to let Tara stay in his room overnight since putting the blonde in the guest room with Hermione might cause her to raise some awkward questions, Harry had gone upstairs to make sure he hadn't left anything... interesting... lying around and was therefore the last person to make it to the table for dinner. As he lowered himself into his seat, his eyes landed on the brightly colored bag in front of Narcissa and widened in horror. "You cannot be serious."

"Of course not. He's my first cousin as you very well know." Harry rolled his eyes, swearing to never make use of that particular pun

again for the rest of his life. "As for this..." Narcissa unrolled the top of the white and red paper bag before reaching in and removing a cardboard box. "If you'd been down here to pick your own food, I wouldn't have had to pick it for you, now would I? You didn't want sushi and I wasn't about to send poor Dora running all over London."

Harry sighed as Narcissa flicked her wand, levitating the bag and sending it floating slowly down the table towards him. "But... McDonald's? You could pick any restaurant in London and you sent her to McDonald's?"

Shrugging, Narcissa canceled her spell on the bag and flipped her sandwich's container open before floating the entire thing up to mouth level. "What can I say? I was in the mood for two all beef patties, special sauce, lettuce, cheese, pickles, and onions on a sesame seed bun. Dora had a map of all the Feng Sushi locations for obvious reasons and I happen to know where most of the McDonald's in London are. We combined the two and discovered it's only a three minute walk from the Feng Sushi on Stoney Street to the Boland House McDonald's." Leaning in, she proceeded to take a large bite out of the hovering burger before lifting a napkin to her mouth and dabbing at her lips delicately. "The rest of the house gets the sushi they wanted and I get my Big Mac. Everybody wins."

A few choice words he'd picked up from his trainers in his old world - albeit none in English, since he had no desire to be magically slapped upside the head by his mother - escaped as Harry tugged the bag to him and pulled it open. Inside were... two white boxes with red hànzi on them? Laughter erupted at his befuddled expression and continued as he pulled both out, checking the contents of each. Pork fried rice and... sweet and sour pork? Or chicken? Or possibly cat? They all looked alike and, slathered in the same sauce, were indistinguishable enough taste-wise that he would never bet on his ability to tell the difference. Dora finally took pity on him. "I knew you wouldn't eat anything from Feng Sushi and you're not a fan of fast food either. You didn't honestly think I was going to sit here listening to you whine all night, did you? I put in an order for you at The Well because I've heard good things from my coworkers, then I called Feng Sushi to order the Meeting Box for the rest of us, picked them up in that order, and then hiked to the Golden Arches for Aunt Narcissa. An apparition and a trip through the floo, and dinner was served."

Leaning over, Daphne peered at his food before giving the wide variety of sushi Dora had brought home a distrustful look. "I don't know. The more I hear about this, the more I think that Harry and Lady Malfoy had the right idea. I thought you were kidding when you said you wanted to eat raw fish for dinner. What do you think I am, a merperson?"

"Daphne... you do realize that the steak tartare your mother serves at some of her parties is raw beef, right? And salmon tartare is raw salmon?" Tracey carefully inspected the different pieces of sushi before picking up one that Harry was pretty sure was rice topped with salmon. "What's the difference between salmon tartare and this? Other than one being on toast and the other being on rice?"

Daphne shrugged before scrunching up her nose in disgust as Tracey took an experimental bite. "Nothing, I guess. And that might mean more if I didn't think tartare was disgusting too." Turning to Harry, the strawberry blonde offered her best pout. "Harry. You're not going to let me go hungry just because I don't want to eat the icky raw fish, would you?"

Seeker's quickness serving him well, Harry yanked the two cartons to him and slid an arm into place between him and Daphne to guard them. "I'm not sharing my food with you, Daphne."

Staring at him with wide eyes, Daphne's lower lip wobbled. "But..."

"You know that there's not much I won't eat." Reaching into the bag, Harry found a pair of chopsticks and unwrapped them, breaking them in half and using one to point at the platter of sushi. "The fact that I wouldn't eat what the twins were ordering should have been a sign."

Daphne's expression morphed into a scowl as she grabbed the plate in front of her, turning her attention to the variety of food laid out in front of her, particularly the soba noodle salad. "Just so you know, I'm taking your Christmas present back tomorrow."

Joe's Note: This chapter is a weird little animal, made up of a replacement for at least one scene that was removed due to Su's absence, a bit of new content, and then the replacement of the James/Tonks material because... well, James - or rather Lily, but James was there - raised Dora in this version. I felt that the two of them together would be even more pseudo-incestuous than Rowling's Harry going 'I think of the Weasley parents as surrogate parents and their children as my siblings but there's nothing wrong with banging one of them'. Eww. It's not the only reason I dislike H/G, but it's one of the top reasons, that's for sure. Anyways... so, James got a new girlfriend in this version. An OC, since I didn't really like the few remaining options among established characters, and believe me I debated my options heavily with friends. Read, enjoy, review, and if the redhead reminds you of someone from another property entirely - or another character in Harry Potter - let's just say that you're not wrong on either count...

Sitting on the bed she'd be borrowing for the next ten days, Hermione stared at the book in her hands. Even though it wasn't an actual published book, it was probably going to be the most valuable one in the collection she'd started assembling on the day of her first visit to Diagon Alley. The Complete Guide to Things Purebloods Forget You Don't Know by 'Narcissa and Lily'. Hermione had no idea how Harry had talked his mother and her friend into dedicating the time but as best she could tell from the brief look she'd taken after unwrapping it downstairs, the women had taken turns filling page after page with a variety of knowledge accumulated - and presented - from two drastically opposing viewpoints. Lady Potter had gone through what Hermione herself was now dealing with, trying to acclimate to a completely new culture while dealing with people who had grown up in it while on the other side of things, Lady Malfoy knew what it was like to be one of those who got exasperated at dealing with people who should know things but didn't. Between the two of them and their book... Hermione got the feeling she actually had a chance of getting the hang of this wizarding world thing.

Dinner with the pair of older women had been... interesting, bringing Hermione back to a mystery that had been plaguing her since Samhuinn: what exactly was the nature of the relationship between the houses of Malfoy and Potter? On a blood level they were literally linked by Harry's grandmother and Tara's great-grandfather, who were siblings. When it came to interpersonal interaction... there was

Harry and Tara, obviously, but the more time Hermione spent with the ladies of the respective houses, the clearer it became that they too were friends and didn't just end up occupying the same space due to their children's friendship. But even given that they shared some common interests and ideals, the fact that their husbands - and houses - fell on opposite sides of the invisible line drawn down the middle of the wizarding world made it hard for Hermione to comprehend how they maintained a friendship. The two appeared to share an almost inappropriate level of physical familiarity as well, although the more Hermione pondered that, the more Harry and Tara's behavior made sense. Their respective mothers were tactile and so the children had learned the behavior from watching the parents interact and had come to imitate it themselves. Why their mothers were like that, on the other hand... that was the question.

A question that she likely wasn't going to get answered anytime soon, she realized, since she sure as hell wasn't going to ask Harry about it - after all, she had no desire to open herself up to a new round of teasing about her supposed interest in his mother - and she didn't know Tara well enough to approach her about the subject. So instead Hermione focused back on her gift, which in turn led her to think about what she'd given Harry for Christmas. To be honest, she'd been relieved to remove the wrapping paper and find herself staring at a book; it made her feel a little better about getting one for Harry for Christmas herself. After all, neither of them could make bookworm jokes if they were both guilty. And while wasn't a traditional 'young boy' present according to her parents, she hadn't known what else to get him. He was from a fairly wealthy family, she knew, so his needs were more than likely very well met by his parents. And while he didn't go out of his way to flaunt it, he didn't seem to want for much either. Finally, she'd settled on an OWL prep book for Defense Against the Dark Arts. As much as he tried to hide it, she was all too aware that he was far ahead of the rest of them in at least some fields of magic. She wasn't sure how far ahead, but figured the book would be a good way of gauging his ability level before she bought him anything else.

Looking down at the three girls sitting on sleeping bags on the floor of 'her' room - and what in the world had inspired Lady Potter to declare 'sleepover!' and invite the others to stay? - Hermione found herself simultaneously applauding and cursing Harry. Just like his gift to her, his presents to the other members of their group had been exceedingly well thought out and considerate. Which in turn

made her generic combination of a book for each Angel from the subject she knew they were weakest in, a fancy quill, and ink in their house's primary color seem... well, rather generic. She was especially ashamed of the fact that she'd been beaten to the punch on both Tracey and Daphne; he'd checked with her before buying anything to ensure he wouldn't double up on her own gifts, and had given both something that was incredibly obvious, especially since she'd been present for the conversations that had probably sparked the thoughts in his mind.

Tracey was a half-blood who was essentially muggleborn due to how she'd been raised before the later thaw that allowed her to move freely and easily between her mother and father's worlds. She liked horror, fantasy, and science fiction books and - like Harry and Hermione herself - read far ahead of her age level. Harry had gone out and found a number of Stephen King novels for her, including copies of *Carrie*, *The Shining*, and the first four books in the *Dark Tower* series. Tracey had then proved herself to be significantly less uptight than her pureblood half-sister, tackling Harry hard enough to tip him up and over the arm of the sofa and onto the floor.

And considering Hermione had been present for the discussion about the pureblood's anemia... it was no secret that out of Harry's five Angels, Daphne was the one affected worst by the cold Scottish winter at Hogwarts. Why hadn't she thought of buying the strawberry blonde something to help keep her warm? Hell, Harry had managed three somethings: a matching set of a cloak, elbow-length gloves, and a tuque that were all charmed to produce just enough heat to keep Daphne comfortable, whether she was inside or exposed to the elements. All three also had a cosmetic charm on them, allowing them to shift between Gryffindor red with gold trim and a shade of teal that matched Daphne's eyes. The tuque even had an extra bit of charm work on it: when red, it actually grew a lion's ears, black eyes, a nose, whiskers, and a mane of golden fur. It was ridiculously cute and despite the fact that she normally wasn't at all a 'cute' sort of girl, Hermione wanted one of her own. Lucky.

As for Tara... Hermione stared down at the blonde, watching as the Slytherin used her wand to change the color of her charmed pajama top over and over, which in turn caused the similarly charmed hair clips Harry had given her to shift to match. They could even imitate patterns if the design was small enough, making them the perfect accessory for literally anything that Tara could think of to wear.

Hermione wasn't girly enough to find such a thing useful in her own life but at the same time, she acknowledged that Tara was more feminine than she was and was quite pleased with what was - to her at least - evidently a very useful gift.

Suddenly, Hermione realized that in her excitement to unwrap her own gift, she had tossed her present for Harry at him. The other girls... she remembered them opening their presents from Harry, but if they'd handed him anything, she certainly hadn't seen it. Now she was curious. "You know, I just realized that I was too busy with mine to notice Harry opening his presents. What did the rest of you get him?"

"Kneazle Knuts." Wait, what? Daphne grinned at the baffled look at Hermione's face. "They're scrip for a store in Diagon Alley that sells familiars a bit more interesting than what Magical Menagerie and Eeylops stock."

"The same thing as Daphne, but a smaller amount." The half-sisters glanced at each other and made a series of subtle movements, ending with Tracey rolling her eyes and looking back at Hermione a second before Daphne. "From what Su told us, Harry doesn't have a familiar. The owl he uses is only on loan from Jasmine for this year. So next summer, he can take our presents to the store and pick up something other than an owl, cat, rat, or toad - which is allowed by the rules once you're not a first year anymore - and he should even have enough left for a carrier and some food."

Huh. That made a lot of sense. And made her book look pretty cheap in comparison, even if it was equal in value to the little packages she'd put together for her fellow Angels. Hermione looked over at Tara, arching a brow at the blonde pureblood. It took Tara a few seconds to realize that she was the center of attention and she blushed as she stopped fiddling with her pajama top. "Nothing physical. More of a promise. And nothing I can talk about with you all. Sorry. Nothing against any of you, but it's a family thing and... you may be my friends, but you're not my family." Pausing briefly, she offered a Mona Lisa smile as she extended one hand. "Unless someone here wants to offer me a ring? Hermione, I'm looking mostly at you with that offer..."

Hefting her pillow to hurl it at the blonde, Hermione paused as she finally took notice of the case. Silver with green snakes. Ignoring

Daphne and Tracey as they enjoyed a giggle at her expense, Hermione turned down the covers and found matching sheets. Not exactly what one would expect to find in the house of a family that was traditionally sorted into Gryffindor. Eyeing Tara oddly as the blonde restored her pajama top to how it had originally looked - green with embroidered silver snakes that were animated to slither to and fro - Hermione held up the pillow. "Pass. Although... how much will an explanation of this very interesting pillow and the matching sheets cost me?"

While Hermione wasn't expecting a major reaction from the usually composed Tara, she was expecting... well, something. Instead, the blonde just shrugged boredly and rose to her feet, padding over to the closet and opening it to reveal clothes similar to the ones they'd seen her wear on weekends at Hogwarts. "I'm here a lot. My mother and Lily spent a lot of time together this summer planning our Samhuinn festival, plus we come over to see my cousin Cassie since Lily watches her on weekdays. Since the Potters don't actually have guests very often, the 'guest room' is more of my room. Why?"

"Just curious. You have to admit, it does stand out in a house full of Gryffindors and future Gryffindors. And one Hufflepuff, although Dora probably doesn't get much say in decorating." Hermione dropped the pillow in question back on the bed, running her hand over it slowly. For some odd reason she got the sense that there was more to the story, but badgering Tara likely wouldn't do anything other than make for an uncomfortable sleepover. If she was willing to lie or withhold the truth once, she'd do it again. "So, is anyone here actually looking forward to breakfast by Chef Harry tomorrow morning?"

Tara's hand went up.

"Anyone other than the girl related to the cook?"

Women who care about how macho you are, Harry? They're not the kind of women you bring home to your mother...

Mothers. Remember his nickname for you?

...fine, Lily, the kind you bring home to your mothers. Sure, every woman says she wants a prince to ride in on a horse and rescue her

before whisking her off into the sunset, but what are you going to do when you get there? If that's the most important thing about you to her? Enjoy her for a few months and then...

Ugh, Cissy, must you? This is my son we're writing for, after all.

Yes, because you're such a prude.

For you? Maybe not. But I want to picture my son having sex with a woman about as much as you want to picture Tara tangled up in bed with some grunting, thrusting ma...

Point taken. Thank you ever so much, Lily, I believe I'll be working on my self-obliviation skills later. Now... where were we?

Macho versus manly. And Harry, you're already most of the way there. Because a real man? He's there for his family on every level. He doesn't tell his wife that his holding a job absolves him from needing to be a member of the household. He helps cook and clean, which you do. He's there for his wife and his children, which... well, your sisters, Dora, Tara, Cissy, and I are the closest you're going to get for the next half a decade or so and if how you treat us is any indication, some woman out there is going to be very lucky one day.

Very lucky. Especially since you're not only domesticated but rich enough to buy house elves so she won't need to carry her weight. What are you looking at me like that for, Lily? It's not like I was introduced to them when I married Lucius. My parents had two house elves when I was growing up, Sirius's parents had a few... didn't you tell me that James's parents had one and it died of old age a year after you two married and you refused to let him replace it? There's nothing wrong with house elves.

...don't make me put you on the sofa for the night, Cissy. I know I will, I've seen me do it.

Groaning, Harry pinched the bridge of his nose and promised himself that if the word 'spew' ever emerged from Hermione's mouth, he would ban her from ever coming near his mother again. The last thing he needed was Hermione's enthusiasm and his mother's free time and money coming together over a common cause. Or at least that particular common cause. Sure, Dobby had been a friend in his

old universe but situations like his were the exception to the rule. Most people treated house elves... not 'well', per say, but they weren't abused or anything. They were treated like the servants they were and given work to do, which was a perfectly acceptable situation from the house elves' perspective. Trying to upset the status quo would just anger a lot of people... people who they would need help from in the future. What were his mother's chances, for instance, of getting the Ministry to work with the muggle government to get her that backyard railroad siding if she pissed off most of the powerful purebloods who had the Minister's ear?

A knock on the door made Harry close *The Complete Guide to Things Women Wish Their Men Knew*, setting it on his nightstand as he slid out of bed and padded over to see who his visitor was. Opening the door, he blinked at the sight of Tracey in a ruby red tank top with silver trim and matching pajama pants. A splash of color instinctively drew his eyes to her chest, where two markedly different coats of arms were tied together with a ribbon that bore the phrase 'Excogita, Accomoda, Supera'. He stared at it for a long minute, trying to figure out what had inspired Tracey - or someone close to her - to come up with the design... and then he realized he was staring directly at Tracey's chest. Tracey. Who, despite having been developed enough to require real bras back in September and even growing a bit since then, was only eleven. Mentally cursing, he jerked his eyes up to meet hers and tried to scrub the last few seconds from his brain. He hadn't stared at her chest on purpose, he told himself. It was because of her shirt. He wasn't a pedophile. At all.

He did his best to ignore the little voice in the back of his head that was enjoying pointing out that the Luna he'd shagged numerous times in his old universe hadn't been any curvier than Tracey was now, and that the whole situation was his own damn fault. After all, he was the one who'd chosen to surround himself with nothing but preteen girls for company...

Smiling at Tracey and hoping she would have the courtesy to not mention the whole staring thing, Harry stepped back and gestured for her to enter. He made a point to leave the door open for propriety's sake, moving to lean against the wall as he watched her look around curiously before gravitating towards his bookshelves. "So, what brings you to my end of the floor?"

"Well, I don't know about Tara but when this Angel breaks away at the end of the day, she goes back to a common room where she's pretty much ignored." Tracey's words had Harry flashing back to the way both Hermione and Luna had been treated in their early days at Hogwarts, but she was quick to assuage his fears. "Nothing bad. It's just that most of the house is always busy with their own things. You're expected to entertain yourself if you don't want to study. There are small friend groups but I'm not part of any of them just because I spend so much time with you lot. So I guess I'm just used to the quiet at the end of the day. I needed to get away for a bit and since I figured going 'I want to sit in a room alone for awhile' at a sleepover would be rude, I decided to come peek in on you because... well, it's quieter here than there."

Harry shrugged; it made sense to him. "Well, I was just sitting here reading, but feel free to come on in and..." He trailed off as Tracey turned and rushed out of the room, disappearing into the 'guest room' for a few seconds before emerging with a book in hand. Returning to his room, she eyed the pillows he'd piled against his headboard before spreading them into two even piles. Hopping up on his bed, she considered each before moving to sit with her back to the right pile, cracking open the copy of *Carrie* he'd bought her. "...make yourself at home."

When Tracey just snickered but made no move to give up his bed, Harry just sighed and went to retrieve slightly more suitable reading material from his shelf before returning to his bed. Thankfully her redistribution of pillows had just created a spot for her, rather than requiring him to move, and he found himself right back in the same warm groove he'd been occupying before she arrived. Silence descended once more, broken only by the turning of pages and the occasional faint giggle drifting down the hallway.

Almost two full chapters later, Tracey finally broke the silence. "So... do you like heraldry or did you just now finally realize I'm a girl?" Blinking owlishly, Harry looked over at Tracey, who met his gaze before glancing pointedly down at her chest. Harry proceeded to blush almost as red as her shirt, making Tracey giggle softly. "Considering they're nothing new, I'm guessing it's the shirt?"

"Uh, yeah." Harry went to follow her gaze before recalling what his problem had been earlier and keeping his gaze fixed firmly on her face. "I've never really asked what the full story is behind your

parents and so while the idea behind the design is pretty obvious, it doesn't exactly answer any of my questions..."

Tracey stared at him for a moment before nodding decisively and closing her book, setting it down between them. "Considering I pretty much owe you my life after that whole troll thing, I think it's safe to say I can trust you." Sliding off the edge of the bed, she walked over to his desk and picked up a quill, sketching on a piece of parchment for a few minutes before returning to drape a sketch of the design over the book he'd been reading. At his curious look, she gestured to it. "Figured I'd save you more embarrassment." Ah. Definitely appreciated. "Where to start? The war, I guess? William Greengrass was a Death Eater. Not a particularly high-ranking one, but still a Death Eater. On a normal raid to Hampstead, he broke into the house of a young muggle woman named Claudia Davis, was... with... her, and then set her house on fire before casting the Dark Mark and apparating away. What he didn't know was that my mother managed to pull herself together and crawl out of the house before she burned alive and survived to give birth to me. Obviously."

Wow. Talk about a major divergence in the timelines. Harry didn't know what to make of it, or how to respond to Tracey's confession for that matter, so he settled for a simple nod. "Obviously."

"Now, the interesting part is after the war. I've never asked - or been told - exactly how all of this went down, but somehow the solicitor that Aunt Phoebe hired to defend her husband tracked my mother down and they came to an agreement: the Greengrasses would support us for life and help my mother raise her new magical child if she would testify in favor of keeping Father out of Azkaban. Obviously she did and over the last ten years, it's turned into what Daphne told you: he's married to Aunt Phoebe in the wizarding world and my mother in the muggle one and splits his time between the two houses." Returning her attention to the parchment in front of them, Tracey ran her fingers over one of the coats of arms. "Getting back to this... Mum's convinced Aunt Phoebe that the only people who don't know about the Greengrass-Davis family drama at this point are the muggleborns who haven't gotten letters yet, and so the two of them have been putting this design on more and more things. Father isn't pleased but... well, it's two against one. He was outvoted."

Biting his lip to avoid chuckling at that - the way she'd said it made him think Tracey found it amusing, but just because she could laugh at her own family didn't mean she'd approve of him laughing at it - Harry traced a finger over the Latin words on the ribbon that ran beneath the two coats of arms. 'Excogita, Accomoda, Supera'. Unless his rudimentary knowledge of Latin was failing him entirely... "Improvise, Adapt, Overcome?"

"It's actually the Greengrass family motto. Or at least it has been since Dad changed it a few years ago. Not quite sure why he did, mind you, but - according to Mum and Aunt Phoebe at least - he just up and did it on his own. Although if you think about the last eleven years or so... it really does fit our family." Flopping down beside him, Tracey grabbed her book but didn't open it, staring over at him oddly. "Although I just realized... speaking of families and fathers, yours wasn't here at all today. I know aurors work strange hours and captains probably have it even worse, but is that normal?"

Harry grimaced; he'd been hoping that nobody would notice that and ask questions but given the company he kept, perhaps it was only inevitable. He momentarily debated deflecting her or outright lying to protect the illusion of normalcy they were still trying to project to the outside world until he realized... if any of the girls - apart from Tara, who knew his family's dysfunction inside and out - could understand what it was like to be a part of an abnormal family, it was Tracey. "Yeah, actually. He's a bit of a workaholic. According to my mum, it's because of Neville's dad... basically he has to work harder because he's competing with the father of the Boy-Who-Lived for any promotion and politics mean that if they're equal, he automatically loses. So while most fathers in the DMLE are home with their families and letting the bachelors take up the slack, mine's at the office... as always..."

Appearing just inside the front door of her London flat with a sharp crack of apparition, Sheena MacGillivray let the warmth of the room wash over her before shrugging out of her black traveling cloak and hanging it on a hook beside the door. With a second, quieter crack her companion appeared and she held her hand out to accept his cloak as he removed it, hanging it up beside hers. "So, you think cooking is women's work, I'm not in the mood to cook, and the Leaky Cauldron is generally pretty packed on the holidays because most of the wizards who don't know how to cook also don't know how to pass in the muggle world either. Which leaves us with two

options: wait forever for an order of their food, or order muggle take-away. Any preference?"

Her companion just shrugged, wandering over to the green couch that dominated her living room and flopping down bonelessly. "At this point, Sheena, I honestly don't give a damn. I'd even go for one of those disgusting 'Big Macs' that Dora introduced the family to." The redhead rolled her eyes at that; while the American import was far from her favorite, it wasn't nearly as bad as he made it out to be. "Or we could call Scoff again. Their ale-braised beef was brill when I had it last week and you can't go wrong when you go with what you know."

"Did Scoff the other night while you were stuck at home with the family. Hmm. Well, if you're up for eating burgers, what about somewhere a little classier than McDonald's? Gourmet Burger Kitchen isn't too far away." Detouring through the kitchenette on her way over to the couch, she opened up one drawer and dug through the selection of take-away menus she kept for days when she just didn't feel like cooking. Finding the menu she needed, she made her way over to the couch and snuggled in so her companion's head rested on her lap, opening the menu and holding it in place in front of his face for him. "They have one hundred percent Aberdeen Angus, fresh English chicken breast, buffalo, chorizo, lamb..."

James Potter raised a hand and slowly ran his fingers down the options on the menu. "Hmm. A few things here look interesting. The Blue Cheese burger, the Habanero burger... I am a bit curious what buffalo would taste like, too. Or... we could also go with our old standby."

Chuckling, Sheena drew her wand and flicked it, summoning another menu from the still open drawer. "Forget forty-two, a pair of pizzas and a six pack of Bulmers is your Ultimate Answer." James just stared up at her in confusion and the muggleborn rolled her eyes. "Right, I need to get you copies of those books one of these days. Anyways, I suppose we could have pizza if you really want to. Soni's or should I go find the menu for Deliver Me?"

"Soni's sounds good." Taking the newly summoned menu from her, James peered at it for a moment before grinning up at her. "Do I

even need to ask what you want on yours? Considering you're already assuming we need two pizzas?"

Huffing, Sheena cuffed James lightly upside the head for that crack. "I'm a carnivore and proud of it, hon. You may not agree with it but it's my lifestyle choice and I'm sticking to it." She blamed it on her job: serving as the Department of Magical Law Enforcement's consultant on herbology for both during and after raids meant spending most of each day working with magical plants, a number of which exhibited sentient-like behavior. Quite understandably, it had made eating vegetables rather difficult for her. "And you're one to talk. Forty-some options and their Free Choice special, and you always order either a Beef Eater or Soni's Special."

James nodded before passing the Soni's Pizza menu back to her. "That's because Beef Eater and Soni's Special are good pizzas, Sheena."

"So is my Meaty Pizza." And it was a good pizza: ham, spicy beef, spicy pork, and the old pizza classic of pepperoni to round things out. Sure, both of James's choices had meat on them but each had an equal or greater number of vegetables mixed in. Ugh. What a waste of good meat. Sliding a pillow over to take her lap's place under James's head, Sheena wandered back into the kitchenette and tucked both menus back in the drawer before picking up the phone. "So, what's it going to be tonight?"

Having found the remote for the living room television already - and damn, she was sure she'd hidden it better this time - James shrugged off her question as he turned the set on and began flipping from channel to channel. "I don't know, Sheena. Like you said, either one is good with me. So... surprise me."

Well wasn't that a dangerous comment to make to someone with a mischievous streak almost as wide as his own? Green eyes twinkling, Sheena dialed the restaurant and waited for someone to pick up at the other end. "Hullo. Yes, I'll hold." Humming softly along with the music, Sheena stared at the top of James's head as he continued to switch channels, pausing on UK Food for a moment before moving on. Not for the first time, the redhead found herself wondering if their relationship was wrong. Mostly because - when one didn't count their dalliances - she was unattached... and he was most definitely not. He made no attempt to hide it, either; they

regularly discussed his wife, children, and home life and so it wasn't like she could plead ignorance of the matter and delude herself into thinking she was his girlfriend as opposed to being his mistress. But... well, they enjoyed each other's company, had things in common, he was helping her improve her wand skills so she could stop being as reliant on auror protection while in the field, and the sex was fabulous.

Besides, it wasn't as if she had seduced him into committing adultery. He was the one who had approached her. If she hadn't taken advantage of his interest, what would have stopped him from directing his attention elsewhere? Then he'd still be cheating on his wife and she'd still have nothing but her houseplants for company around the flat each time she came home from work. No, Sheena decided, there was nothing wrong with what she was doing. She was guilty of - at most - accepting the attention he paid to her. If anyone was truly guilty in this whole affair, it was James and it didn't seem to weigh on his conscience one bit. So why let it bother her?

Her own conscience assuaged for the moment, Sheena grinned and turned to rest her elbows on the counter. Speaking of fabulous sex... there always was a considerable delay between when she phoned in an order and when it arrived. Whistling softly to get James's attention, Sheena winked as she slowly undid the top button of the white blouse she'd worn to work that day. That was followed by a second and then a third, his eyes slowly growing wider as she exposed a little bit more cleavage each time. As she slipped the fourth black button through its hole, someone finally picked up on the other end again and she paused before grinning wickedly and going back to her game, continuing to undress as she talked. "Hullo again. Still here, yes. I need a delivery. Queenstown Road, the Chelsea Bridge Warf development. I'll come down so your guy doesn't need to wander around looking for us. I need two large pizzas: one South of the Border and one Pepperoni Passion." There. That would show him that she could be unpredictable while staying within her preferred diet... and allow her to have some fun at his expense too.

Not that he'd noticed. The muggleborn smirked at the hungry expression on James's face, knowing it had nothing to do with the dinner she was ordering for them. After undoing the last button, Sheena took a moment to set the phone down on the counter, shrugging her blouse off and throwing it across the room to land on

his head. Picking the phone back up, she wandered over to the fridge and opened the door. "Sorry, just checking all the hiding spots. We need a six pack of cider, too. Bulmers... do you have Red Apple still? You do? Brilliant. Yeah, I'll take that. Uh huh. Okay. Forty-five minutes? That sounds great. Thanks. See you then." Hanging up the phone, she wandered back into the living room and pounced on James, straddling his waist. "It's going to be at least forty-five minutes. They're a little busy for some reason." Leaning in, she began planting kisses along his jaw as his hands disappeared under her knee-length brown skirt, rubbing up and down her legs slowly and venturing a little higher up each time. "Think you can deliver before they do?"

"Can I? I'll deliver for you twice before then. I'll... half a mo." James frowned, hands coming to a stop on her ass with her formerly knee-length skirt bunched around her waist and his brow furrowed as he ran his mind back over what he'd just said. "That... I'm not sure I like how that makes me sound. You know, it implies things about my staying power. What about..." Trailing off, he thought about the matter for another minute or so before shrugging and giving her ass a squeeze. "You know what, I give up. Let's just pretend I said something suave about getting you off twice between now and then, blame it on the fact that you have my blood occupying the head that doesn't contain my brain, and get to the part where I actually get you off twice between now and then."

Sheena giggled again and reached down to run one hand through James's wild black hair. "Don't worry, hon, you've never managed to be suave around me. I'm used to it by now." James scowled and shook his head in an attempt to dislodge her hand, making her laugh more before obliging, reaching up behind her back to unhook the clasp of her bra. Emerald green today, just like every other bra and pair of knickers she owned. He said they brought out her eyes. She... liked things that he liked on her. "Hmm. Here or my room?"

"Why not both?" Abandoning her ass, James slid his hands up her sides and then around to grab the cups of her bra. He waited impatiently as Sheena slid one strap and then the other down her arms before tugging the bra off and replacing the green fabric with his hands, cupping her breasts and squeezing them gently. "Shag here now, and then move to your room for the second round."

"You know, I like the way you think."

"You know, sister, if I didn't know any better..."

"...I would swear we'd been pranked. But Harry..."

"...doesn't strike me as the type."

"Me either. Which makes me wonder..."

"...what are we missing?"

Abandoning his attempts to tempt the large white owl perched on his shoulder with a treat he'd retrieved from his room, Mimas Carrow stood in the doorway of his sisters' bedroom and watched them stare at themselves in the mirror. He debated whether or not to annoy them by pointing out the obvious - that each had a pair of flower shaped hair clips in their hair that were a mixture of Gryffindor red and gold - before deciding he didn't feel like being hexed by them at the moment. Especially given that his parents would probably side with Flora and Hestia and make him figure out how to counter whatever they did to him on his own.

He wasn't sure how he felt about the fact that his enemy was sending gifts to his sisters, or that his father had tried to marry his sisters off to Harry Potter. Except the more he thought about it... was Potter even his enemy? Being enemies required them to interact, didn't it? They'd had two notable encounters in one day back in September, but after the mudblood had broken his nose, Mimas had wised up and kept away from Potter and his little group of followers. A very wise idea, he'd come to find out a month later. After all, if Potter could do that to three full grown mountain trolls, what might the half-blood do to him if sufficiently angered?

Removing one of the clips from her hair, Flora cursed violently as both it and the flower remaining in her hair shifted from red and gold to the green and silver they'd been when they first arrived, Hestia's doing likewise a moment later. When she returned the clip to her hair, new curses erupted from both as the quartet turned red and gold again. Mimas just shook his head; he'd figured out the secret of what Potter had sent them almost instantly. His sisters were older and supposedly wiser. So why was this causing them so much trouble?

Mimas frowned as his thoughts returned to his... well, it wouldn't be for years, but Potter technically was a possible future brother-in-law he supposed, at least until the contract offer was officially rejected. The phrase 'the enemy of my enemy' came to mind. Potter and his girls were most definitely not friends with Neville Longbottom. Potter's mudblood had attacked the chubby wanker bodily twice from what he'd heard, and the Greengrass girl had supposedly demonstrated her ability to cast a stunner on the Boy-Who-Lived. And there was no Carrow left alive who had any fondness for Neville Longbottom.

Hmm. Maybe all this was for the best, Mimas realized. He could use his sisters to soften Potter up and after they'd managed to convince Potter that the Carrows weren't all bad, then perhaps Mimas could approach him again and try to start over. Granted he doubted that any Potter would ever reach a point where they'd fully ally with the Carrows and those like them against Longbottom - his family were unapologetic pureblood supremacists, which put them squarely opposite the Potters on most issues - but they were children still. There was nothing wrong with teaming up to make Longbottom's life hell together, was there?

As his sisters' fifth attempt to unravel the mystery of Potter's gift ended in failure and curses, Mimas sighed and rolled his eyes. "How did you two even manage to move on to second year if you're this dense?" Two nearly identical wands rose to point at him and he raised his hands in surrender. "Honestly, I figured this out about a minute after you opened the package he sent you. And I'm a boy and don't know anything about jewelry."

"Alright then, Mimas." Placing her wand back on her vanity, Flora crossed her arms over her chest and narrowed her eyes at him. "What do you know that we don't?"

Mimas took a step forward and reached up towards his sister's hair, pausing to make sure she wasn't planning to lash out at him for his presumption. When she gestured for him to continue, he slowly removed one of the two hair clips Flora was wearing, and once more all four clips reverted to their original colors. "Now, I saw this one turn bright pink when Hestia touched it. So they're smart enough to know who their owner is." Then he returned the clip to Flora's hair on the opposite side, so she had both on one side while Hestia had

one on each. They remained green and silver. "I think that your two can sense where the other is and then tell Hestia's clips. If what your clips tell hers about how you're wearing them matches what her clips know about how Hestia is wearing them, they change colors. So as long as you don't try to look identical, they'll stay in our house colors."

Backing away, Mimas watched as Flora and Hestia took turns moving their clips into various positions to confirm his theory. Finally, satisfied that he was telling the truth, Hestia turned to look over at him. "Well then since you seem to have all the answers..."

Flora joined her sister in staring at Mimas, finishing Hestia's thought for her as they'd taken to doing as of... thinking back, Mimas didn't remember them doing it at all before the Christmas break of their first year. "...why would Harry send us something like this?"

"I don't know. Most of the school seems to think you're the unholy spawn of Bellatrix Lestrange and one or both Weasley twins; maybe he gets enough of them in his own common room and is trying to send you a message? Or... weren't you telling me that he has younger sisters who are twins?" Flora and Hestia nodded in sync. "Maybe he's used to dealing with sisters who get annoyed when he mixes them up and so he wanted to find a way of marking which of you is which without sending you jumpers with your initials on them or something? Especially with that little letter that Father sent to Potter Manor and all..." Mimas shrugged, earning him a squawk and a nip on the ear from the owl who was using him as a human perch. "Why don't you write him and ask? That's probably why the owl is sticking around."

Holding out one arm, Hestia waited until Potter's owl made the hop from Mimas's shoulder to her forearm before using her free hand to make a shooing motion. "Good idea. Now go..."

"...away, Mimas. We have things to do that don't..."

"...involve wasting our time on you. Oh, and mention..."

"...us in the same sentence as the Weasley twins again and..."

"...see what happens to you. I wonder how long it'd take..."

"...for you to figure out how to fix your skin if we turned..."

"...you Gryffindor red with gold stripes?"

Sigh. Never mind that he'd helped them figure out their stupid hair clips, point out an uncomfortable truth and things went right back to normal. Mimas shook his head in resignation as he wandered off. His sisters were such brats. It made him wonder what would happen if Potter made the same mistake... or what the twins might do to him if the seed he'd planted took root and they decided that was why he'd sent the gift he had.

Hopefully he'd be around to watch.

Not because he was already giving up on his plan of trying to ally with Potter some day against Longbottom.

He just figured it'd be fun to watch someone else gets subjected to his sisters' abuse.

Joe's Note: This chapter should feel much less disjointed as it was written as a singular piece, adapted from the Wand of Uru version of the chapter instead of being a bunch of placeholder scenes cobbled together to cover for the fact that I wanted to show a few things between Christmas and New Years but couldn't make any of them add up to seven thousand words or so.

"She lets everyone else hold her without fussing. I wonder why she reacts so badly to me?"

"Maybe because she can tell the difference between her real mother and a cheap knockoff?" Harry groaned and pinched the bridge of his nose as Narcissa looked around innocently, ignoring Sheena's glare. "Just a thought, mind you. Personally, I think the fact that you hold her like a cauldron about to bubble over has more to do with it."

Huffing, Sheena folded her arms over her chest as she backed away from the car seat resting on the breakfast nook's table, allowing Narcissa to move in and tend to the whimpering Dahlia. "What am I supposed to do? Any time I bring her near me, she vomits on me."

Narcissa didn't even deign to look back over her shoulder, her attention never leaving her daughter. "Most people would get the hint after the first four or five times and stop trying. Harry, you remember how to reach us in Bodmin if something goes wrong, yes? The number for the railway is on..."

"...the desk in my study, yes. Right next to all the parchments that we'll be going over for Wizengamot business this afternoon." Harry gestured next to where his father was standing near the back door of the house. "James is feeding the twins and you'll be back before they are so no problems there, I'll make sure Tara takes a break from trying to get Misha to fly through hoops long enough to eat at least one meal, and... that's about it. Relax. Have fun. Take some pictures. Grab a Big Mac."

As Narcissa appeared to ponder that idea, her wife swept into the room and ran her fingers through her hair a few times before pulling it back into a simple ponytail and securing it with a hair tie. Harry let out a low whistle as he looked Lily over; while he'd known she owned fancy muggle clothes for occasions just like this, he'd never seen her wearing them. While Narcissa was dressed in a simple sundress suitable for a mother out and about for the day, Lily cut a

far sharper figure in a black trouser suit. "The girls were just finishing up when I came down. Cissy, is Dahlia ready to go? And did you remember to pack the nappy bag?" Narcissa gave her wife a baffled look, making Lily roll her eyes. "Why do I even ask? Dobby?"

The house elf appeared with a pop, hovering a blue and white striped bag bigger than his body in front of him. "Dobby is knowing that Missus Lily and Missus Cissy be going out. Dobby had bag ready before master and family be waking up."

"Good job, Dobby. Spend the rest of the afternoon keeping an eye on Tara and Misha for me, would you?" Dobby bowed before popping away and Harry watched in silence as Lily hauled the bag over to the table, giving Narcissa a peck on the lips before opening the bag to make sure the elf hadn't forgotten anything. As the uncomfortable silence stretched on, Sheena slowly gravitated over to stand beside James. Despite his best efforts, Harry couldn't think of a way to restart the conversation in any safe way and so he too remained silent until two sets of feet thundering down the stairs heralded the arrival of... "Jasmine! Rose! Ready to go?"

As the girls entered the room, Harry watched a series of emotions - all negative - flick over his father's face. Harry sucked in a breath, wondering who would be the one to touch off yet another of his family's frequent and explosive fights, but thankfully James was feeling like an adult for once and forced a smile instead. "Looking forward to our day in London, girls?"

Jasmine shrugged indifferently before patting the bulge in one of her trousers' pockets. "Kinda. Harry changed some money over for me so I can go and get another piercing or two." Harry wasn't quite sure how many another 'or two' would make, but considering Jasmine was already a half-dozen or so beyond what James found acceptable, he found himself anticipating an explosion... that thankfully didn't materialize. Wow. Maybe his father really was finally growing up, albeit a few years too late to save his marriage. "And I think Rose still wants to go to the Apple Store."

"Yeah." Shaking her head, Rose pulled an iPod out of the purse she had slung over one shoulder and stared down at it as she poked the unresponsive device. "Maybe if I'm lucky I can get it replaced under warranty again. After all, it's not like they can tell the difference between one that shorted out on its own and one that got zapped by

magic. I still can't believe that I didn't even make it onto the train. Stupid wards at King's Cross..."

Snorting, Harry thought back to the previous year's ride on the Hogwarts Express. Rose had been so excited to show off her new toy, only to whip it out of her bag and find out it was dead. Hopefully she'd be smart enough to leave this one home. "Right then. James, the Apple Store is on Regent Street near the intersection with Beak Street. After that, you just head up to Oxford, hang a left, and Metal Morphosis... well, you can't miss it."

James let out a sigh of resignation. "Right. Muggle electronics and then a tacky muggle piercing parlor. What a wonderful way to spend my day. Alright, let's go. Sheena and I will side-along you to our place and then we'll use her map of the Underground to figure out how to get where we're going."

Shooting an unhappy look at her sister, Rose sighed. "It's my turn to ride with Mini-Mum, isn't it?"

"Yeah. I was the one who had to apparate with her two weeks ago. That means it's your turn." Jasmine let out a chuckle at that. "I'd say I'm sorry, but Mum punishes us when we lie and... well, she's standing right there to hear me do it."

Harry groaned and buried his face in his hands. "And on that note, the government waits for no man. I'll be in my study." Hurrying through the kitchen, Harry ducked into the study he had inherited when he'd succeeded his father as Lord Potter and closed the door behind him. With a groan, he lowered himself into the more ornate of the two chairs in front of his desk. "What does it say about the state of things when I'd rather review upcoming Wizengamot votes with my proxy than spend time with my family?"

Laughing, Dora shifted into the black-haired, green-eyed form she favored when handling anything related to her role as the House of Potter's proxy. After tucking a strand of hair behind her ear, she began digging through the pile of parchments on the desk in search of one particular document. "You think you have it bad? I'm the one who actually has to show up at the sessions."

Point.

Eyes snapping open as his dream came to an end, Harry lay there in his comfortably warm bed for a moment before groaning and sitting up. Another good night's sleep disturbed. He really needed to figure out a way to control these dreams of his, he decided. If only his dreams were showing him a singular, coherent path he could use to guide himself and his friends... well that would be one thing. As it were? He was just losing sleep. And it was really starting to annoy him.

As far as the content of his most recent dream? Harry didn't even want to touch it. Head of the house as a teenager, his parents divorced and presumably both remarried, a new half-sister... it fit with nothing he'd seen so far and so Harry was going to write it off as an odd dream for now. Granted he was pretty sure there was more to it than that but as they said, ignorance was bliss.

A quick thought had his wand slapping against his outstretched hand. "Tempus." A few minutes shy of six o'clock. Hmm. Especially considering he'd be cooking for more people than usual today - and working with an inexperienced helper - he decided to get started early. Gingerly stepping over Tracey's blue sleeping bag - she'd returned to the girls' room with the intention of going to sleep, only to return a minute later dragging her bag and a pillow, quite put out at how energetic and noisy they still were at eleven o'clock at night - Harry made his way down the hall and slipped into the guest room. He almost went straight to the girl on the bed... and then he remembered that Hermione was the official resident of the room until January 5th and probably hadn't surrendered the bed to Tara for the night. As for Daphne versus Tara... picking which sleeping bag to poke with his foot was easy. One was the source of loud snoring. The other held a rather restless body that rolled back and forth several times before noticing Harry and glaring. "C'mon, Tara. You promised."

"Do you know how much sleep I didn't get last night? Between the sleepover and the sleeping on the floor and..."

Sighing, Harry offered Tara a hand as she crawled out of her sleeping bag, pulling her to her feet. "Come help with breakfast and then after Daphne and Tracey floo home, you can take a nap in my room. I'll keep Hermione and the twins busy so it'll be nice and quiet. Maybe get Dora in on things and have her entertain whichever twin Hermione and I aren't with at the time. Sound good?"

Tara leaned on him as they left the guest room - or her room, depending on who one asked - behind, making their way down the stairs towards the ground floor. "You're too mature and polite for your own good, Harry. Not that I mind, of course. But if you keep it up, either more people are going to figure out your secret... or you're going to start getting more letters with offers." She winked at him. "At the rate you're going, one of them might be from the House of Malfoy."

Her words made him roll his eyes and, having finally caught on to her game the night before, Harry decided to return fire and turn it back on her. "Well, they say most girls grow up to look like their mother. If it starts looking like all you've inherited from Lucius is the hair... I might be interested in a letter with an offer." Tara came to an abrupt halt at his words and Harry continued on down the steps with a smirk on his face, making the left and quick right that brought him into the kitchen, his smirk fading in favor of a disgusted expression as he once again walked in on his mother and Narcissa snogging. The two were almost as bad as Hermione and Ron, he thought in amusement. As Tara caught back up with him, he reached over and covered her mouth with his hand, preventing her from alerting the two women to their presence as he raised his wand. Flicking it, he transfigured Narcissa's blue negligee into a red velvet dress trimmed with white fur. "I saw Mummy kissing Missus Claus."

"Harry!" Pulling away from Narcissa, Lily tugged the two sides of her dressing gown back together, which only served to bring attention to the fact that far too much of her had been on display. Narcissa looked, as always, nonplussed about being discovered, calmly drawing her wand and using it to return her nightgown to normal. "One of these days, I'm going to make you start wearing a bell."

Harry rubbed his chin for a moment. "Well, I do get on well with Katie, but I'm not sure how I'd go about wearing her..." Lily and Narcissa just stared at him blankly and he blushed. "Right. You don't know the names of everyone at Hogwarts and so that joke falls a bit flat. Katie Bell. She's a chaser on the Gryffindor quidditch team. Wear a Bell. Get it?"

Rolling her eyes, Lily opened her mouth, paused, and then spoke. "Tempus." The sight of the time made her curse under her breath. "Well, there goes 'why aren't you asleep?' and 'why are you down

here?'. For you at least. Tara, on the other hand... what are you of all people doing out of bed? You're almost as bad as Dora about getting up, even if you hide it better."

"Your evil son made me. I was not amused." Pulling away from Harry, Tara stomped over to the refrigerator, opened the door, and stared at the contents. "...what exactly am I supposed to be doing here, Harry?"

Harry chuckled softly at Tara's question, gaining a bit of volume at the look on their mothers' faces. "Mum, you now have mornings off when Tara and I are both in the house. She's going to take over cooking with me. I figured that if she was going to be the house's fifth kid, she should do something to help out too. It's her Christmas present to me... and I suppose you too." Leaving his gaping mother standing by the kitchen island, Harry walked over to the fridge and gently pushed Tara out of the way. "Full English. Might as well toss you into the deep end and let you learn a little of everything. Then you can pick one or two things to focus on next time you have to cook with me, master those, and then take on a third and maybe a fourth down the road."

Eyes widening, Tara stared at him incredulously. "A full English? Isn't that pretty much everything we have for breakfast each day at Hogwarts?" He nodded. "For ten of us?" He nodded again. "Are you sure we can't start this new 'helping Harry' thing tomorrow or something?"

"It's not so bad. Mum and I have done it before and I had to feed the Dursleys back in my old universe. Believe me, I'm pretty sure my uncle and cousin alone ate close to ten peoples' worth of food." Tara still looked dubious and Harry patted her on the shoulder reassuringly. "Just... think of it like a much tastier Potions class. Follow instructions, chop, add, stir, and voila. Arms out."

Tara extended her arms obediently and Harry began to load her up with some of the food she'd be helping him cook that morning. As he dug deeper into the fridge in search of bacon, a question from Tara brought him to a halt. "Food just burns, right? There's no chance of me turning this into some sickly green mess that melts through the skillet and then eats the stove, right?"

Looking back over his shoulder, Harry raised an eyebrow at the odd query. "...no? And can you put what you're holding on the counter near the stove?"

"Don't look at me like that." Tara turned away and stomped over to deliver the food to the counter before returning. "This is what Dobby and the other house elves are for at Malfoy Manor. I don't even know where the kitchen there is."

Lily groaned, drawing Harry's attention to the fact that she and Narcissa had retreated to the breakfast nook, the redhead standing behind her lover as she ran a conjured brush through Narcissa's increasingly long and curly hair. "I have a bad feeling about this..."

With the exception of ruining a few mushrooms before getting the hang of frying things, breakfast preparation went off without a hitch. Afterwards, Daphne and Tracey returned to Greengrass Manor via the floo and Tara retreated to Harry's bed for a well deserved nap, Harry keeping everyone away from the second floor for the day as promised. That evening, Narcissa and Tara departed for Malfoy Manor; evidently Lucius was finally returning from the business trip that had taken him away for the last two weeks and Narcissa felt obliged to play good wife for a bit longer and be waiting at home upon his return.

The following evening, three nights before he was scheduled to visit the Greengrass Estate to celebrate New Years with his friends, the family's dinner was disrupted by the sudden, low whine of the wards announcing a visitor who wasn't keyed in for open access to the manor and grounds. James rose from his seat, drawing his wand as he walked towards the back door, only to relax and let out a sigh of relief. Opening it, he gestured for the visitor to enter. "Headmaster! Come in. You're right on time."

He was? That was news to Harry. And, judging by the look on his mother's face, news to Lily as well. Although it did explain why James was actually home and acting like a part of the family for once. Dumbledore had probably owled him asking for permission to visit for some reason, and therefore James had made a point of putting in an appearance so he could find out what the headmaster wanted. As Harry pondered that, his mother recovered and pasted on a smile. "Albus! What can I do for you? I haven't heard from you since Samhuinn, if I remember right."

"Ah, it would seem that unlike my own, your memory is working quite well these days. No, I've come to speak with you and your husband about your son." Dumbledore's eyes took in the assembled crowd in the dining room before his gaze landed on one particular Potter and he inclined his head slightly. "With young Harry included, of course."

Oh, this could not be a good thing. Looking around the table, Harry made a snap decision and began issuing orders to clear the room out as expediently as possible. "Everyone into the formal dining room. Jasmine, do it or I won't let you use my Nimbus for the rest of hols. Rose, do it or I won't let Jasmine use my Nimbus and she'll take it out on you because she'll know it's your fault. Dora, you still owe me so go with them and keep an eye on them. Hermione, just... go please?" Huffing, the twins slid out of their chairs and grabbed their plates and silverware before stomping, off shooting him glares in between curious looks at the famed Hogwarts headmaster. Hermione didn't look too much happier but nodded and followed them. Dora brought up the rear, shifting her short black bob into a long mane of red hair that matched Lily's current style and color. That made James jerk and stare at her oddly, which Harry filed away for future consideration. For now, however, he had more important issues to deal with. "Headmaster Dumbledore. Have a good Christmas?"

Dumbledore nodded, conjuring up a seat across the table from Harry. "Indeed I did. Alas, I still have yet to convince people that all I truly need these days are nice warm socks and so I received far too many expensive gifts, but it is the thought that counts, I suppose." His gaze flickered over to the door through which the others had recently passed. "You're just as capable a leader at home as you are on the field, it appears."

"With all due respect, Headmaster, I'm sure you're not here to become another member of Harry's Angels." Receiving confused looks both from his parents and Dumbledore, Harry gave an embarrassed shrug. "It turns out that after the trolls, Hermione and my other friends conspired to organize a not-so-secret society to protect me from myself. They've decided to call themselves Harry's Angels. It's touching, in an odd sort of way."

Leaning back in his chair, Dumbledore shook his head. "It is always important to have friends willing to watch one's back, Harry, but you

are quite right in assuming that is not why I'm here. Although your encounter with the trolls is one of the reasons. First and most importantly, I wanted to discuss the idea of you potentially testing out of your year and joining the second years at a minimum, if not higher. I have discussed you with every one of your teachers and with the exception of Professor Snape, all of them recognize you are performing far beyond your peers at present. You must be terribly bored."

Harry winced as his father fixed him with an incredulous stare; while his mother had known everything - or close enough - for months now, the true extent of Harry's abilities was news to James. And it meant that he was going to have to sell two different, very perceptive people on the story that he'd given Luna to print in The Quibbler and hope for the best. Not exactly how he'd planned doing this, but the best laid plans of mice and men... "Well, Headmaster, my mother is the brightest witch of her generation. I didn't just buy some books the day after my birthday, sling them into my trunk, and then forget them until the first day of class. I don't use my letters home to let her know who the Weasley twins pranked that week. I read them. I study. I try to figure out why things work the way they do instead of just waving a wand and accepting that things happen 'because we're wizards'. And if I can't, I ask Mum. And my friends are a part of it all. Is it really a surprise that we're outscoring students like Crabbe and Goyle?"

"If it were merely 'outscoring', Harry, I would not be here. You are, as best your professors can tell, far ahead of your peers in most every subject. Noticeably so." Dumbledore leaned back in his chair, eyeing Harry consideringly. "And while it is true that your friends are also working at a level beyond the first year curriculum, it is you who seems to be the driving force beyond that... and the most talented member of your group."

Harry nodded; false modesty would be wasted on a man who had obviously done enough research into his classroom habits to know this much. "Alright then, to what end?" Dumbledore stared at him in confusion. "If I can pass whatever tests you give me, you would let me advance to second year early?" The headmaster nodded. "What if I can pass the second year exams? Would you let me become a third year? Maybe sit for my OWLs and take NEWT-level courses? Or even take my NEWTs so I can graduate this summer? And who

else are you going to extend this offer to? Tara? Daphne? Tracey? Su? Should Hermione be here for this discussion?"

Looking past Harry, presumably at the doorway to the formal dining room where Hermione was finishing dinner with the others, Dumbledore let out a thoughtful hum. "Your professors were quite certain that while your friends were gifted, it was your presence that pushed them so far above the rest of your classmates. That if you were removed from their classes, that their actual level of ability might be a bit lower. If that genuinely isn't the case..?" Harry shook his head. "Hmm. As for your first question, Harry, I feel I must turn it back upon you... how far ahead do you think you are?"

"I don't think I'm ahead. I think the rest of my year is behind. Then again, part of the school's fault, really." It was a risky gamble for Harry to make; he knew that Dumbledore tended to be defensive of his staff and curriculum - Snape, Trelawney, and their substandard DADA instruction being notable examples - and there was a good chance he'd close down and change the subject, but it also carried the risk of drawing further attention to Harry's true level of knowledge, which was decidedly post-NEWT in many areas. "After all, if they can get an Acceptable for doing almost no work, why bother studying any more than they have to? Or thinking past the question we're given for homework? Even if they don't want to change up what they teach us and give us more difficult work, professors could make students work harder for good grades. Study more. Think more." Harry shrugged. "Just my two knuts."

Just as Harry had hoped, Dumbledore was quick to dismiss his thoughts and the criticism of his school. "Something to be considered, of course. As are your feelings regarding your friends and their suitability for progression. Perhaps at the end of year, your overall marks can be looked at and all six families' parents can be brought together to discuss the matter. Shall we then move onward to the matter of your most curious wand? Your mother mentioned it on Samhuinn but alas, I have been sufficiently busy that I've been unable to see you to ask you about it."

Harry nodded slowly and drew his wand from his forearm holster, letting it rest on his upturned palm as he held it out for inspection but not extending his arm enough to put the wand in grabbing range for any of the adults at the table. "Eleven inches. Holly, with a thestral hair core."

"Dear me." Dumbledore reached out to take the wand from Harry, only to find himself denied when Harry yanked his hand back, having anticipated the move. "I can ask Ollivander to open all of his private stocks of materials to you and craft a wand for you from scratch no matter the cost and charge it to Hogwarts, but I cannot in good conscience allow a wand such as this to remain in the hands of someone as young as you." Harry shook his head emphatically, causing Dumbledore to turn to his parents in search of reinforcements. "James, Lily, surely you must see that I am only watching out for your son's best interests here."

Just as eagerly as James shook his head, Lily made her unwillingness to consent known. "I refuse to cripple my son's magic just because you think it's a good idea, Albus. The wand picks the wizard and this was the only wand in Ollivander's that was compatible with Harry. Entire studies have been done on how badly the wrong wand can affect a wizard's ability to cast properly and I won't subject Harry to that just to make you happy. End of discussion." Huh. Given how unhappy she'd been about his 'Deathstick' back when they'd bought it, he hadn't entirely seen that one coming...

Much to Harry's surprise, it was his father rather than Dumbledore himself who came to the defense of the idea. "C'mon, Lily. This isn't Fudge or one of his lackeys trying to give us advice. It's Albus Dumbledore. I'm sure that if he says we can find another wand that's as good or even a better match for our son that it's true. I mean Ollivander usually only uses what, three different core materials? Other wandmakers use others... Ollivander used another for this one. I'm sure we can find a happy medium between the boring cores that won't work for him and a sodding thestral hair. I mean, have you even heard of another wizard with that as the core of his wand?" Dumbledore. Grindelwald. Gregorovitch. Oh wait, he wasn't supposed to know that. Drat. "Just the idea of my son walking around with a piece of one of those beasts in his hand makes me uncomfortable."

Lily shook her head decisively. "No. You don't get to show up once in a while and make parenting decisions, James. You've made it exceedingly clear whose responsibility raising these children is: mine. My word is final and I say that no, we won't be taking Harry's wand away from him. Is there anything else, Headmaster?"

Just like on Samhuinn against the trolls, pieces of various ideas and scenarios began to flit through Harry's head, fusing together into a coherent plan. After all, he didn't need Dumbledore making another attempt at seizing his wand 'for his own good', nor did he need his schoolwork being gone over with a fine-toothed comb. And he'd always wondered if he could learn to wield two wands, like one of his trainers had been able to. "Or..." The three adults turned to look at him as Harry stared off into space, fingers drumming on the tabletop. "How about this? Between now and the beginning of spring term, I go to Ollivander's and he can make a custom wand for me. I'll switch to it and my holly and thestral hair wand will remain at home with my mother. If, though, his custom wand doesn't work right, I want the right to send home for my wand." Dumbledore stared at him for a long moment before reluctantly nodding his agreement. "And for classes... obviously they'd need to agree, but I think I have an idea that might work out well for my Angels and I. What if I promise to finish my work, check on my friends', and then the six of us will help anyone else who needs help?"

"Given that - despite my personal feelings on the matter - I have no way of forcing the matter short of approaching the Board of Governors and attempting to convince them that you are a hazard to the safety of the school... I suppose I must reluctantly agree to your terms, Harry." Bracing against the edge of the table, Dumbledore slowly rose to his feet before peering down at Harry over the top of his glasses. "Before I go, though... is there anything you'd like to talk to me about, Harry? Aside from what we've already spoken of, that is."

Hmm. Strangely similar words... and Harry decided to take advantage of the opening this time. "What are your thoughts when it comes to oneiromancy, sir?"

Surprise flashed across Dumbledore's face before he managed to school it back into a genial grin. "While I find divination in general most fascinating, if imprecise at times, when it comes to dreams... are dreams not our mind's manifestations of our desires and fears? Attempting to find a greater meaning in them strikes me as an exercise that can be described as futile at best. Where did you hear of oneiromancy, Harry?"

So much for that idea, Harry thought. He'd hoped that perhaps Dumbledore would know someone who could help him control his dreams, although getting past him to interact with the person would have been difficult. If he could have at least baited the headmaster into dropping a name, though, he could have sent a letter or something. Damn. "Just curious. Heard a few of the third years discussing different kinds of divination and wondered if there was anything to that dream I keep having about ending up Head Boy."

Eyes twinkling, Dumbledore inclined his head slightly. "At this point, m'boy, I doubt there will be many who can stand between you and that goal..."

"Are you sure this is a good idea, Harry? Generally when a girl offers you an invitation for you plus one, it's just to be polite. Especially when it's a girl who has shown an interest in you. I'm not sure what it means when it's a girl whose family has tried to sell her to you, though."

Rolling his eyes, Harry leaned back against the sofa and watched the fireplace for any hint of green flames. "I checked with Tracey before she and Daphne left and she said it'd be fine. Maybe I should have double-checked with Daphne but... well, sometimes it's just easier to beg for forgiveness than ask for permission."

Beside him, Tara chuckled softly. "Well, just in case she does kill you for being such an insensitive prat... Mum, can I have Harry's room as the new 'guest room'?" Lily jerked at being addressed as such by Tara, which in turn made Harry smirk. She'd found it quite funny when Harry had taken to calling Narcissa 'Mother' but evidently the reverse wasn't quite as amusing to her. "Although if Daphne does complain, I guess I can always tell her that I have plans with you, Mother, and bring Luna back here with me. I have to admit, after the whole interview thing, I can't wait to meet her. She sounds fascinating."

Fascinating. That was one of the politer terms he'd heard used to describe Luna Lovegood, Harry had to admit. Suddenly something occurred to him and he looked over at Tara speculatively. While over at Luna's for the interview, he'd subtly prodded her about her daily life and no mention of friends had ever come up. Not even Ginny; Luna had acknowledged that she was aware of both the wizarding families living nearby but apparently hadn't interacted with

either the Diggorys or the Weasleys beyond seeing them while in town with her parents. Tonight would probably be one of the first times Luna ever spent any real amount of time with people her own age and it was going to be around some fairly forceful personalities. Was he setting into motion events that would cause the split he'd seen in his dreams? Inviting Luna to the party would cause her to meet Tara, who in turn could bias the younger blonde in favor of her own house. Was that the reason that this Luna seemed destined for Slytherin?

A roar from the fireplace pulled Harry from his thoughts and Harry watched as Luna emerged from the green flames with a grace he found himself envying. Before he could greet her, Tara was rising from her spot beside him and crossing the room to extend a hand. "Altaira Malfoy."

Luna took the offered hand and, much to Harry's surprise, raised it to her lips so she could press a kiss against the back. "Younger and slightly smaller version of Altaira Malfoy." She was, too, Harry realized after a moment. It was probably due to the different genders that he never saw the resemblance in his original universe, but here Luna and Tara looked similar enough to be sisters, although the similarly styled green dresses didn't do much to help in that area. After releasing Tara's hand, Luna shook her head and frowned. "But I'm supposed to be Luna Lovegood. This won't do at all. Hmm." Pulling her wand from behind her ear - and he never had gotten around to asking why she had one already and how she'd gotten it - Luna tapped it against the top of her head. "Mutare coloris."

Black poured from the tip of her wand like spilled ink and Harry watched in disbelief as the girl before him turned into the figure from his dreams. Was that really it? The great mystery of Luna's 'dark side' was that she didn't want to look like Tara if they ended up in a house together? He continued to stare as the two girls talked quietly, then turned back to the fireplace and disappeared one after another into the green flames. Oh. Right. Party. Surging up off the sofa, Harry grabbed a handful of floo powder and hurled it into the flames before throwing himself in after them. "Greengrass Manor!"

After the usual gut-wrenching trip through the floo, Harry stumbled out into a familiar foyer in Woodbridge, managing to keep upright for once only to be assaulted by memories of the last time he'd paid a visit to Greengrass Manor: leaping flames, shouts, screams, flashes

of light, death... the night he had gone from surpassing Dumbledore in power to officially supplanting him as the leader of the country's light-aligned forces. The night he'd saved Daphne and Astoria from a fate he wouldn't even wish upon the most hated of his enemies. The night Luna had created the first two members of what would quickly become a burgeoning population of British crumple-horned snorkacks. Thoughts of his Luna made him look over at the one accompanying him, who was eyeing him uncertainly. "Harry? Are you okay?"

"He doesn't travel well by floo. Or portkey. Or the Knight Bus. Or, well, anything. Give him a few seconds; it'll pass." Harry looked to his right, nodding his thanks to Tara. It made him even gladder that at least one of his friends knew his secrets. Everything in life was easier with someone covering your back. "Alright there, Harry?"

Harry nodded and straightened up, making a show of taking a deep breath and letting it out. "Yeah, I'm good. Now, where's our hostess?" A strawberry blonde blur slammed into him and Harry grunted at the impact, barely managing to stay upright. Patting his friend on the back, he waited for Daphne to pull back a bit before smiling down at her. "Speak of the devil. Evening, Daphne. Miss us?"

Letting out a little sniff, the Greengrass heiress pulled away from Harry and ran her hands over her dress to smooth out any wrinkles. "Maybe." Adopting a more serious expression, she curtsied. "Welcome to Greengrass Manor, Mister Potter. Miss Malfoy." Her eyes landed on Luna and she frowned. "...I don't know who you are. Where did you come from?" A sigh came from behind Daphne and she turned to look at the approaching Tracey. "What?"

"I'm pretty sure I remember telling you that Harry asked about actually bringing that guest you mentioned on his invitation. There's someone here that you didn't directly invite, who's standing in our foyer next to Harry. Take a wild guess as to who she is." Brushing past her half-sister, Tracey graced each of them with a smile before focusing on Luna. "Since Daphne's evidently forgotten some key things from the etiquette classes that Aunt Phoebe made her take... my name is Tracey Davis. This is Daphne Greengrass, my half-sister. And you are?"

"Lovegood. Luna Lovegood."

Harry barely managed to keep from laughing at her introduction, but gave in and started chuckling when she began humming the Bond theme under her breath. Taking pity on both Daphne and Tracey, the former looking incredibly confused as the latter struggled not to join him in laughing, Harry decided to get things moving forward again. "Now that she knows who you are and you know who she is... where are Hermione and Su?" He and Hermione had split up for the evening, the muggleborn venturing off through the floo to the Lis' British residence while Harry remained at Potter Manor to collect Luna and Tara before escorting them to Woodbridge. As Daphne turned and led them deeper into the house, Harry looked around curiously. Hmm. Place was much nicer when it wasn't burning down around him, he decided.

As they entered the living room, Harry found himself under attack yet again, this time by Su. Who, he discovered, had broken ranks with the other girls for the evening and forgone Western fashion in favor of a dress from her homeland. He decided to concentrate more on it than the girl wearing it for his sanity's sake and from an aesthetic perspective, it was very pretty: a knee-length red silk qípáo with ferocious gold lions embroidered on it. Maybe she could get it in a larger size for the Yule Ball, when she'd be old enough that he'd only feel mildly weird for appreciating her in it? "Gōng xī fā cái."

After a second's hesitation, Harry decided to respond to her New Year's well wishes in her native language. After all, it wasn't like they'd be holding an extensive conversation in Mandarin. He could always explain it away as doing a little research in hopes of impressing Su. "Hóng bāo ná lái!"

"Funny, Harry. I'll get you a red envelope and shove it sideways up your arse." Turning away, Su stalked back over to where Hermione was sitting on one of four matching two-seaters that had been arranged in a square facing each other. Picking up a small package resting on the coffee table, Su tossed it up and down a few times. "You know, I should keep this just to teach you some manners..." Suddenly she pulled her arm back before hurling the object at him. "Zhuā!"

Catching small, fast moving objects was definitely something he was good at. Harry's hand snapped out and captured the palm-sized disc as he rounded one of the two-seaters, taking a seat across from

Hermione as Su settled beside the brunette and fiddling with the wrapping paper. Tara and Luna quickly moved to occupy the two-seater to his left, leaving the final one to Tracey and Daphne. Harry was a bit curious as to the empty seat beside him but figured they'd probably end up circulating through the spot over the course of the night. Then he peeled the wrapping paper away and blinked, pulling out a glass circle surrounded by a gold rim etched with a mix of hànzi and runes. "What is it?"

"As a major port city in China, Shanghai sees a lot of foreigners both on the muggle and magical sides. These were originally designed for the government to read travelers' papers, and then someone got the idea of selling smaller versions to normal witches and wizards to help raise money for the Ministry during a lean year." Leaning forward, Su gestured for Harry to hold it out and pointed to individual hànzi. "Mandarin... that one actually cost me a bit extra to have added because not many people need it. Cantonese. French. German. Italian. Russian. Just tap your wand against the hànzi you need and then run it over some text and you'll see English."

Well wasn't that just nifty? Especially since he spoke some Mandarin but couldn't read or write it worth a damn, and he was mostly useless when it came to other foreign languages. "I'd say I can think of dozens of ways to use this but honestly there's really only one." Su pondered that for a moment before nodding and Harry leaned in further to give her another quick hug before retreating to his seat. "Thanks. Your present's at Hogwarts but it'll be worth the wait, honest."

Movement in the corner of his eye made Harry look over at where Luna was reaching behind her neck to fiddle with something. At his questioning look, she pulled off something he hadn't even noticed her wearing simply because he'd become so accustomed to seeing it on the other Luna: a butterbeer cork necklace. He really should have, though, considering it had been missing when they'd first met. Tonight, he'd missed not one but two; she'd evidently worn one to keep and one to share. Approaching him, Luna looped the necklace around his neck and fastened the clasp before giving him a quick hug. "You got me that lovely book, so I figured I should give you at least a little something. It's not much but I hope you like it."

"Erm... thanks, Luna. It's very nice."

Unlike the look Daphne was giving Luna at the moment...

"Harry?" Looking to his left at the speaker, Harry winced at the meaty thump of his cargo hitting the doorframe and quickly returned his attention to where he was hovering Hermione along beside him. Daphne let out a faint giggle before sobering. "Are we going to discuss a certain letter your father received or is it just going to be this erumpent in the room for the near future?"

Actually, he would have been perfectly content to let it be the 'erumpent in the room', personally, but Harry doubted Daphne would be content with that state of affairs. He managed to buy himself a bit of time as they arrived at the guest rooms, letting Daphne lead the way with Su floating behind her before hovering Hermione in ahead of himself. It took Harry a minute or so longer to get Hermione squared away in her bed and when he returned to the hallway, Daphne was standing there with an expectant look on her face. He sighed. "I'm not sure. Isn't this the sort of business your father and my father should be discussing? I'm not sure either of us is smart enough to make such an important decision about the future of the Houses of Potter and Greengrass..."

Daphne winced at the none-too-subtle barb towards her public attitude about marriage and her future spouse and lifestyle. "I deserve that, I guess. But I don't think you realize what it's like to be in my position. Even if my father's been forced into a more neutral position by my mother and Aunt Claudia, that doesn't mean the family won't keep to certain traditions. He has no sons and my mother doesn't want to have another child. Who I marry will mean everything to the family. And so I'm not supposed to marry for love, Harry, I'm supposed to marry for gain. You're smart, the heir to your family, powerful enough to stun trolls on your own, and my father knew we were friends even before Samhuinn because I'd written home about you. Are you really surprised he wants to take advantage of the situation?"

"Err, Daphne? You stunned Neville for making a marriage comment a few months ago. So yes, I am surprised that I'm getting owls from your father trying to sell you to me. And you're right about me not knowing anything about the position you're in. My grandparents turned down contract offers for my father and he married my mother out of love. They weren't planning to marry me off for political reasons... or at least if they were, they never told me." Daphne let out a huff and pushed off the wall she was leaning against, heading back towards the living room and their other friends. Groaning, Harry

took off in pursuit. "What? I'm just saying... we're eleven. Why can't we be friends for now and if something else happens when we get older, then your father and mine can talk paperwork? Because you may be fine with what your family wants to do, but there is no way I'm going to make such a huge decision about my life before even getting my first kiss."

That made Daphne stumble and Harry lunged forward, grabbing a fistful of the back of her dress to keep her from tumbling down the stairs. She righted herself and gave him a grateful smile that quickly shifted back into an incredulous expression. "You haven't kissed anyone yet?"

Harry rolled his eyes and passed her, continuing down the stairs. "Daphne, I'm eleven and a half. And surrounded by five female friends who follow me around most of the time. What do you think?"

"We all thought that was why you were sneaking off. Well, Hermione and Tracey and I did." Harry looked back over her shoulder at him and she blushed as she shrugged defensively. "What? We all know you have secrets. Su says that you traded with her and she knows at least one thing we don't, but that she doesn't think it has anything to do with where you disappear to. She didn't think it was a secret girlfriend, but didn't have any better idea. Tara just smirks whenever it comes up, so we're pretty sure she knows but she won't say a word."

Too right she wouldn't. They were called Unbreakable Vows for a reason, after all. As they entered the living room, Harry headed for the blonde in question and began trying to separate the mad tangle of limbs that Tara and Luna had fused into after falling asleep on the same two-seater. "So, do you at least agree on my supposed girlfriend or do I have two or three?"

Daphne let out an exasperated groan. "If you must know... Hermione thinks it's Parvati because she says she's seen you sneaking looks at her. Tracey says Ráichéal for the same reason." Yes, because both girls were different than he remembered and he often found himself staring at the 'oddness' of them wearing the 'wrong' uniforms. "Me, on the other hand? I think it's Cherise Cram. You're nicer to her than you are to anyone other than our little group, and she definitely treats you better than the others in our year." Harry opened his mouth to protest at least the latter but Daphne was

ready for him. "Oh? Then what do you make of her offering to tutor you even though she told two second years and Megan that she was too busy to tutor anyone?"

Deciding that he was more likely to get Hagrid to give up raising dangerous creatures than he was to separate the pair on the sofa, Harry flicked his wand and levitated both of them. "Drat. Fine, you're on to me. I'm secretly dating a girl almost half again my age. I'm surprised you didn't catch on earlier, what with how easy to read she is to you." Daphne opened her mouth, closed it, opened it again, and then scowled. "I don't have a girlfriend, Daphne. I'm an eleven-year-old with eleven-year-old friends. I'm just barely past the 'girls are icky' phase and you're... just past the being icky phase."

"Hmmp. Well fine. Feel free to think that most girls are icky if you want. Less competition for me when you finally come around." Harry rolled his eyes but figured that was good enough for now. If she slipped down the road and began pushing too hard on the potential pairing off front, he'd have further words with her then. Joining him as she navigated her floating half-sister towards the stairs, Daphne shot a look at the two entangled bodies he was levitating. "What are you going to do with them?"

Harry pondered that as they climbed the stairs again. They were deep enough asleep to have noticed neither his efforts to separate them nor the trip upstairs. They were both fully dressed, in dresses covering enough that even accidental impropriety was unlikely to occur. "Well, considering you didn't plan a bed for her despite me telling you she was coming... I guess I'll just put both of them in Tara's bed in the room her and I were supposed to share."

While it was obvious that Daphne wasn't keen on Harry sharing a room with a girl who had sent him a competing offer for marriage - even as a trick - it was equally obvious that she had no better idea for how to handle the situation. "Alright. See you in the morning." And with that, she slipped past him and guided Tracey through an open doorway further down the hall, emerging a minute later and closing the door behind her before crossing the hall to enter the room opposite. Another door closed and Harry found himself standing alone in the barely lit hall, two softly snoring girls floating beside him.

"Witches: can't live with them, can't continue the species without them."

The morning of January 5th dawned bright and cold, but thankfully it wasn't as hectic as it could have been. As much as Harry liked the Weasleys - well, most of them - their last minute rushes to pack had always irritated him. Perhaps it was something Petunia Dursley had instilled in him, but saving such an important task for when one had the most to worry about and the least amount of time to accomplish things just seemed foolish.

With his siblings dressed and fed, his father off at work as always, and his and Hermione's trunks packed and ready to go, all that was left to do was finish the sit down he'd asked his mother to make time for and then they'd floo over to King's Cross to board the train. With James out of the house, the two had opted to retreat to the privacy - and security - of his office. "So at least if these dreams of yours are true..."

"...then Sirius is going to end up sending Cassie to Beauxbatons next fall instead of Hogwarts. And considering Anastasiya is from Ukraine, I doubt it's going to be her who convinces him to send their daughter there." Leaning back, Harry steepled his fingers under his chin as he stared off into space. "So really, the only way it could possibly happen is if I touch things off by influencing the Blacks. Which makes the real question... do I want to? I mean, it has obvious benefits for Cassie: I know at least Fleur Delacour will be there and her sister Gabrielle might be. Cassie can learn to control her powers with - or from - other young veela. And Beauxbatons is an all-girls school, which means even if she does have control problems with her allure, there's a much smaller chance of something awkward happening. Hogwarts, on the other hand, is a coed school in a bigoted country. I think we can both agree that at least in the short term, it would be best for her to cross the Channel for school. Which brings us to the problem of... how do we get Sirius to settle on that plan of action?"

Lily's brow furrowed as she considered the problem. "Fleur... she was in her seventh year when you were in your fourth, right? So counting backwards, she's in her fourth year now. Which means even if there was some sort of pen pal program still in place, it'd be hard to explain away you getting her: she's not a first year like you,

nor is she a big name seventh year that they might have matched with you as a celebrity thing after your little Samhuinn escapade."

Even though it was an incredibly minor piece of the bigger picture, Harry's mind latched onto one particular word. "Still? As in, there used to be one?"

"Well, Hogwarts still has one today. Just not with Beauxbatons. You see, back in 1987, a certain someone decided that he needed to defend the honor of his pen pal after some sort of drama involving her long-distance boyfriend, and sent a cursed letter to said ex-boyfriend that turned him into a frog. For three months." Lily rolled her eyes. "The headmistress of the boy's school blamed the headmaster of Beauxbatons for the whole affair and needless to say, he was none too happy with Hogwarts over the fuss it caused. And thus ended the pen pal program between Hogwarts and Beauxbatons."

Harry let out a snicker. Sirius, presumably. Now if only he'd known about that in his original universe; he could have asked the man to send a copy of the letter to Umbridge at some point. "Moving on... what about taking advantage of Mother? The Malfoys are French, aren't they? They're bigots and I'm sure there's at least one of them still in school over in Beauxbatons. If they're anywhere near as whiny as Draco was, I'm sure word of the 'veela trash' they have to share 'their' school with has reached Lucius - and Narcissa - by now. Hint hint."

After giving the idea some consideration, Lily shrugged and noted it down on the parchment in front of her. "Well, it's not like I have any better idea. So... get Cissy up to speed about a lie involving her husband and a French veela schoolgirl, lie to Sirius about a French veela schoolgirl with Cissy's help, send any more incoming marriage proposals up to Hogwarts because James is refusing to deal with them himself, look for James's invisibility cloak because it's actually the Cloak of Invisibility and a Deathly Hallow and you want it for something but won't tell me what... anything else or can we get going before we're late for the train?"

Gently tugging on the chain, Harry pulled out his pocket watch and checked how close they were cutting things. "We still have an entire... oh, right, train. I should know better by now. Alright, I'm done unless you have anything you want to ask me."

"Oh, I have plenty of things I want to ask you, Harry. The problem is that I don't think I'll get answers to half of them." Ouch. He wasn't that bad... was he? He'd told the broad strokes of his former life and its major events, had told them about the horcruxes and the final battle, about his former friends - both peers and adults - and about Luna. Did it really bother her so much that she didn't know every little detail? From the look in his mother's eyes, Harry was forced to revise his opinion to yes. Hmm. Maybe when he came back this summer, he could try and fill in some of the holes for her. Some things had to stay hidden for everyone's sake, but she had to have some questions that were safe for him to answer. He was drawn out of his thoughts as his mother flicked her wand, quickly pulling her lengthening red hair into a braid that fell down her back. "Off we go, then."

Nodding, Harry followed behind her obediently as they left the study, turning left and then coming to a quick stop right before entering the kitchen. Peering curiously around his mother, Harry smirked at the sight of an impatient looking Hermione and a pouting Jasmine. "Maybe I'll see you this summer? You can come over and we can fly again?"

"Sure, Jasmine." Before Hermione could continue, though, Jasmine took advantage of what she thought was an empty room and latched onto the brunette, delivering a hug and a peck on the cheek, neither of which Hermione returned. Then she pulled back, only to catch sight of her mother and older brother. Blushing bright red, Jasmine raced between them and out of the room. "Not a word, Harry Potter. Not one word."

Harry raised his hands in surrender. "Okay. Besides, talking about how you ended up curled up with Su in her bed at Daphne's house is much more interesting anyways."

That induced both a blush and a growl and Harry took a step backwards, slipping halfway behind his mother for protection. "I told you, I got up in the middle of the night to go to the bathroom and got in the wrong bed when I came back. I didn't notice Su in it because those beds were huge; you probably could have fit all of us in one of them. And... you know what, it was completely harmless and I wouldn't need to explain myself to you even if it was something dirty!" Huffing, Hermione grabbed a handful of floo powder out of the

dish on the mantle and pitched it into the fire. "Platform Nine and Three-Quarters!"

Inching out from behind his mother, Harry shook his head. "That girl is far too easy to tease. Oh well. It's payback for her needling me when I got those contracts. She deserves it."

"Uh huh. Say that again when you're not hiding behind me. Possibly to her face." Harry shuddered and his mother grabbed a handful of powder for herself, tossing it into the fire. "Hurry up, Harry. You're costing me precious locomotive ogling time. Platform Nine and Three-Quarters!"

Harry opened his mouth, only to close it as his mother disappeared through the dancing emerald flames. Looking over at where Dora was still sitting in the breakfast nook, nibbling on a piece of toast and reading a book, a thought occurred to Harry. If she was willing to be a Wizengamot proxy... "Don't suppose I can hire you to take my place on the Express today, can I? I'll meet you at Hogsmeade?"

Looking up, Dora shifted her pink spikes into a mix of her own pink and his black for a moment before shaking her head and restoring her hair to normal. Or at least normal for her. "Sorry, Harrykins, but I've already done my time. Forty-two trips on the Express was enough for me. And you're lucky; I had to come home for both breaks back when I went to Hogwarts. Aunt Lily's letting you stay at school."

"True. Although between Hermione's abuse and this whole mess with Daphne's parents wanting to sell her to me, I might be begging for a break from Hogwarts by Easter." Harry shook his head as Dora laughed, grabbing some floo powder for himself. "Platform Nine and Three-Quarters!"

Watching the rather bland countryside roll by as the Hogwarts Express made its way back towards Scotland, Harry yawned and tuned out the idle conversation going on between the girls. About half an hour into the trip, the girls had broken out the books Hermione had bought them and begun passing them around. After a quick discussion, they'd settled on charms practice as the activity of the afternoon and cracked open Daphne's book to go through some of the practice exercises it contained.

A burst of red light filled the cabin and Harry turned just in time to get a face full of rose petals. There was absolute silence for a long moment before the girls started giggling madly, taking in the newly redecorated compartment. Sighing, he rose to his feet, spilling a large pile of petals from his lap onto the floor. "And on that note, I'm going to take a walk. You lot have fun cleaning that one up."

Ignoring their pleading, Harry exited the compartment and closed the door behind him. Who cared if they didn't know how to vanish things yet? They should have thought of that before conjuring up a ridiculously large amount of rose petals. He wasn't their maid, after all.

Walking down the corridor, Harry occasionally peeked into the compartments as he passed. Holiday spirit was evidently still in full swing, with most of his peers busy showing off their favorite acquisitions to their friends. It almost made Harry feel guilty for not sharing the Marauder's Map and the true nature of his new pocket watch with his friends. Almost. After all, a boy had to have some secrets and while the girls didn't seem to be the type who'd rat him out, he also knew what jealousy or even just a bad mood could drive a friend to do.

Cough Ron cough.

Speaking of Weasleys, though, Harry found himself staring at two of them as he entered the next car of the train. Two Weasleys and a Waters to be precise, the twins bookending their younger friend as they whispered together about some havoc they'd either already caused or were in the process of planning. "...still can't believe how well this new wand works for me. Same wood, same core, a quarter of an inch longer and I'm a whole new witch." Olivia waved said wand for emphasis, releasing a spray of red and gold sparkles. "Ollivander said it'd be great for charms, which will be a plus for our..." Suddenly, she trailed off as the three realized they weren't alone. "Potter."

"Waters. Weasley Twin the First. Weasley Twin the Second." Harry moved to one side of the hallway and gestured for them to pass, only to change his mind and hold out his hand as he realized he had both questions for Olivia and a very convenient means of starting a conversation with her. Drawing his wand, he held it out towards her. "And I know what you mean about new wands. The headmaster

paid for a new wand to replace the one that's been causing my magic to flare and all of a sudden, transfiguration and charms are a breeze. Makes sense, though, seeing as how the whole idea was to give me better control."

Olivia nodded and then tilted her head to the side as she stared at his wand. "This might be a stupid question, but I'm going to ask it anyways. If there was a wand at Ollivander's that's better for you than the one you came to school with, why didn't you buy it instead of the other one?"

Ah, now there was a loaded question whose answer was probably going to cause him an entirely new round of grief. But his peers were bound to find out eventually, and since Harry wanted to continue the conversation past the subject of wands... "It wasn't there. The headmaster paid Ollivander to make me a wand from the, err, special stocks."

"Blimey! You mean the rare..."

"...woods and cores that he usually..."

"...only brings out when the Ministry pays..."

"...for a new wand for an auror who breaks theirs..."

"...doing something really heroic?" The twins looked at Harry, at each other, and then back at Harry. "Wicked!"

...pretty much the reaction he'd been afraid of in a nutshell. Now even Olivia, a muggleborn who had previously lacked an appreciation for the significance of a wand from Ollivander's 'special stocks' was looking at his wand in awe. Sighing, Harry channeled a small burst of magic through his wand to create a spray of red and gold sparks. "Still eleven inches of holly, so at least it feels the same to me. New core, though: two preparations of griffinette." That got him odd looks and Harry chuckled. "Cooking joke. Griffinettes don't grow big enough to have feathers long enough to be wand cores, so Ollivander used a feather and some fur taken from the same griffinette instead of trying two or three feathers."

Olivia nodded sagely before blinking. "Wait, what's a griffinette?"

"It's a pygmy griffin. All the fun of a griffin without your familiar being big enough to maul you." While waiting for Ollivander to complete his wand, Harry and his parents - both of them this time; James had actually come out to watch the festivities unlike in August - had wandered over to Oriens's Owlery and Other Odd Ones to get a look at what he might spend his Kneazle Knuts on come that summer. The griffinettes had been easy enough to find - they were the sole source of any bird-like noise that wasn't an owl's hoot - and after spending a bit of time with the strange little creatures, Harry had come to realize it was a core material that did represent his current situation rather well: a hybrid of two things, stuck in a very small body. But before things got any further off track, Harry decided to retake control of the conversation and go for the information he'd been after when he'd stopped them. "Just out of curiosity, what electives were you thinking of taking next year?"

That garnered him looks from all three members of the trio but eventually Olivia answered. "Arithmancy and Ancient Runes. Why?"

Harry affected a disinterested shrug. "Just curious. That's what my mom took when she was a student here. She was cleaning the attic and found more of her old school things over the holidays and so she started nagging me about what classes I was going to take. I hadn't even started thinking about it yet because I don't need to for a year and a half, but decided to start asking people anyways before Mum ambushes me with questions in her next letter. So far, those two are popular with the girls and Care of Magical Creatures and Divination are the classes of choice for the boys. Or Muggle Studies." Tilting his head to one side, Harry did his best to look like he was struggling to remember something. "The girls all think those two courses are most useful after we graduate. The boys pick Magical Creatures because of the interesting animals, and the other two because they're easy. And something about the Divination professor telling people they're going to die?"

Bringing his hands up to cover his heart, Fred - or was it George? - sighed. "Oh, dear Professor Trelawney. Your drunken ramblings have now..."

"...started scaring off students two years before they can even..."

"...set foot in your class. We salute you!" George - or maybe it was Fred, Harry still wasn't sure - grinned. "She's an utter hack and drinks like a fish..."

"...but she's without a doubt the most entertainment you'll..."

"...get short of one of our Hogsmeade weekends."

Well, it was good to know that Trelawney hadn't up and become some sort of all-knowing oracle in this world. Grinning, Harry offered his teammates and their friend a thumbs up. "Good to know. Alright, see you at the next practice." Olivia didn't look like she quite believed his explanation but allowed the twins to drag her off anyways and Harry sighed in relief before mentally making another check mark in his mind. He'd had two 'sitting around the common room dreams' over the break and remembered seeing Olivia studying with the quidditch team's three chasers. After questioning all four girls, he was four for four when it came to the electives they'd been taking in his dreams and what they were taking now - or planning to take, in the cases of Olivia and Katie. Not that such knowledge was useful directly, but it meant that if he ever saw otherwise, he could safely disregard that particular dream as being a normal dream instead of anything of import.

As he continued down the length of the train, Harry found himself wondering if he was turning into Dumbledore. Half-truths, total lies, manipulating the people around him for a 'greater good'... except he knew there was an alternative out there. If he died tomorrow, taking his secrets to the grave, Dumbledore could guide Neville onward. It wasn't like his world, where Dumbledore's penchant for jealously guarding his accumulated knowledge had left Harry wholly unprepared for the war after his mentor's death. A soft cough made him realize that his preoccupied wanders had brought him to the end of the car... or rather to stand in front of a familiar dark-haired boy waiting outside the last compartment of the car. "Potter."

"Carrow." The two stared at each other for a long moment and then Carrow looked away, pushing past Harry roughly and wandering off in the direction Harry had just come from. Opening the compartment door, Harry entered and took a deep breath before taking a seat on the unoccupied bench. "Carrows."

"Potter. Or can we call you Harry? It feels strange calling a potential husband by his last name, you know?" Harry nodded at... Flora, according to the traces of magic that clung to her hair clips. "So... I can't help but notice that we didn't receive a certain letter when you sent us our Christmas presents. Which we like very much, by the way, even if we did spend a while swearing because someone forgot to include instructions."

Harry grinned at that, leaning back and stretching his arms out along the back of the seat. "Well... it was either a test of your brains to see if you were even worth talking to or me forgetting to stick a parchment in the box. Which would make you feel better?"

Shooting her sister a look, Hestia's lips quirked up. "I don't know about Flora, but I'd rather think I was being tested than think that Father was trying to marry us to a dunderhead." She let out a giggle before nudging her sister. "See, I told you that someday I'd find a use for something I learned in Potions."

A groan and a shake of her head was all Flora allowed herself before returning her attention to Harry. "At any rate, you didn't send a certain letter with your gifts and now you're visiting us in person. Before this goes any further, though, you should probably know that just because I'm in Slytherin doesn't mean I like emeralds. If you haven't bought me a ring or fished it out of a family vault yet, can you maybe find something in amethyst for me?"

"Sorry, there aren't any rings in your future. At least from me." The girls adopted identical pouts and Harry raised an eyebrow; were they really that eager to be sold off by their father, most likely for political reasons? Probably as a method of reinforcing his own 'I'm a productive member of society who suffered under the Imperius and so I'm not actually a dark wizard' bona fides? "What?"

The twins sat there nudging each other and snickering until Flora finally gave in and spoke for the pair. "All girls like pretty shiny things, Harry. We're kinda like niffles that way." Ah. So they didn't want the marriage contract signed and the resulting bond so much as the jewelry they'd get from it. Okay. That was significantly less creepy. "Okay, so if that's not why you're here... why are you here?"

Personally, Harry was asking himself the same thing. Especially since Tara would kill him if she found out about this. "Are you two in

any real hurry to be married off by your father? I could be wrong, but I doubt your family lets women inherit - or even men through women - so you're not really good for much other than being future housewives as far as purebloods are concerned. Is that really what you want?" Hestia shook her head, followed a fraction of a second later by Flora. "So me leaving the contract hanging helps you, right? Unless someone better than me comes along, your father won't try to cancel it and send a new one to another family?" The twins thought about that for a moment before nodding. "So I'll make you a deal. You help me with something and a letter gets mailed to your father saying the House of Potter needs time to think about his generous offer or something like that."

"Well, we might actually be willing to say yes if you told us what you wanted."

"Oh, right. I've heard most of your house ignores you. Probably because you're more than a little scary." The twins pouted at that but Harry refused to be swayed, pushing on. "That makes you two the perfect pair to watch - and watch out for - my cousin." He got two blank looks for that; had Tara not explained to anyone why she hung out with his group? Well, that certainly explained some of the looks they got. "Altaira Malfoy. She's my second cousin once removed: her great-grandfather Pollux Black was the older brother of my grandmother Dorea Black. Well, Dorea Potter when she died, obviously."

Hestia perked up. "Oh, Tara. Yeah, she's our cousin too. Her grandmother Druella is our grandmother's little sister. So the three of us are second cousins."

Furrowing her brow, Flora considered the newly presented facts. "Does that mean we're related?"

"Considering there's a marriage contract on the table... do you really want us to be?" That earned him a disgusted look and Harry chuckled. "Anyways, do we have a deal? I help you from being hung out there like meat at the market and you help keep my cousin safe? And who knows, maybe come my third year if we're still working together, I can start treating you on Hogsmeade weekends?"

Flora looked at Hestia.

Hestia looked at Flora.

"Deal."

Since they weren't eager to have Mimas back in their compartment - especially if he'd found Crabbe and Goyle while off wandering the train - and he had no desire to return to the flowery mess he was sure his friends had yet to deal with, Harry ended up riding the rest of the way to Hogwarts with Flora and Hestia as they got to know each other better. After giving each girl a farewell that included a hug and a kiss to the back of her hand, Harry allowed them to get a half minute head start before exiting the train himself and going in search of his friends.

They weren't especially hard to find. Not only were they the largest single clump of bodies on the platform, most other students congregating in twos or threes, but they were being given a wide birth by everyone else. As he approached them, Harry blinked a few times to make sure his eyes weren't deceiving him before chuckling. "Good evening, Angels. I like what you've done with your hair."

"Likewise." The crisp Scottish brogue made Harry look over in surprise, eyebrows shooting up at the sight of Professor McGonagall approaching them. "Mister Potter. Ladies. I take it from the lack of students needing to be tended to by Madam Pomfrey that you had an uneventful journey... at least in one sense."

Harry gasped, bringing one hand up to his chest. "Professor! You wound me! You act like I'm the one who starts the trouble. It's not my fault that purebloods can't seem to keep their bigoted opinions to themselves around me. Or that they tend to get injured shortly after expressing their opinions."

"I'm sure, Mister Potter." Wow. That was a level of skeptical disbelief usually reserved for the twins. Were he and his Angels really that bad? Turning to the girls, McGonagall cleared her throat. "Now then. What on earth happened to you lot?"

After exchanging looks, the girls ducked their heads almost as one, nobody wanting to have to answer the rather formidable professor. And unlike them, it was impossible for Harry to provide the information she was seeking even though he was willing; he'd found out about the change only moments before her. Finally, a voice from

behind McGonagall provided the answer to the mystery. "That would be me, ma'am."

The professor took a step to the side as she turned to face the newcomer and Harry let out a low whistle as he caught sight of her. Okay, she had to be unique to this universe, Harry decided, because if she'd existed in his original world? He was pretty sure that he would have noticed her. If not, there was something seriously wrong with him. While he couldn't tell much about her figure owing to the long black robes that she - and every other student - wore, she still drew his eye. With long, wavy red hair and brilliant green eyes... Harry abruptly paused as the glint of light off metal drew his eye to the badge affixed to her robes.

Wait a second. A green-eyed redhead who was the Head Girl? Wow. If this wasn't a case of Oedipus Hex, he didn't know what was. Harry stared at her for a long moment before shrugging mentally; she wasn't actually related to him - much less his actual mother - and so it wasn't actually wrong to think she was hot... right? Caught up in his contemplations, it didn't even occur to Harry to wonder how she'd ended up involved in his friends' transformation. Luckily for him, McGonagall was a bit more impatient. "Miss Corwin? I would have hoped that my head girl was beyond such pettiness as jinxing first years."

"To be fair, I had a good reason." 'Miss Corwin' moved to stand beside the first year girls, gesturing to them with one hand. "I came across them playing with advanced charms; they'd managed to fill their compartment with three inches of rose petals and were trying to figure out how to get rid of them. So I decided to do them a favor and get rid of the petals... and give them a lasting reminder of why it's not a good idea to play with magic you're not ready for." Reaching up, she ruffled the mass of leaves and peonies that had replaced Su's hair. "Plus I got to work on my partial animate-to-animate transfigurations, which you said were a weakness of mine. Everybody wins."

Humming softly, the transfiguration professor approached the silent first years and inspected each girl's hair carefully. "Very nice peonies on Miss Li. Please stop fidgeting, Miss Malfoy. Thank you. Ah, your roses have much better definition, Miss Corwin. Very good. Miss Greengrass, lower your head a bit more... look here, Miss Corwin. Your lilies still need a bit more work; the stamens lack

definition. Better, though. And I'm sure Miss Granger enjoys having her flowers in her house color but the Scarlet Pimpernel isn't actually scarlet in real life. Orange and blue mostly, although some of them are red. As for Miss Davis..." Peering over the top of her glasses, she reached up to touch one of the blossoms. "Is this... long-beaked stork's bill? I don't think I've ever had a student try to transfigure these, much less succeed. Take fifteen points for Gryffindor. How long will they be like this if it's not reversed intentionally?"

Rachel - now that he thought about it, Harry definitely remembered Cherise referring to a meeting with the head girl as a 'chat with Rachel' - looked the girls over before returning her gaze to McGonagall and shrugging. "Not before dinner, Professor, if that's what you're asking. I can undo it if you want, though."

"No. Perhaps at breakfast on Monday if it hasn't reverted by then." The girls let out outraged gasps at that, only to fall silent at McGonagall's glare. "I agree with your logic; perhaps they'll learn something from the experience. I'll warn the elves that they'll have some extra cleaning to do." With that, McGonagall turned and joined the tail end of the line of students waiting for carriages up to the school. Chuckling, Rachel ruffled Su's no-longer-hair again before following suit.

Watching the sway of the redhead's hips as she walked away, Harry let out another whistle of appreciation: her combination of position, appearance, and personality made her even more creepily similar to his mother, but after how deftly she'd managed his Angels, he couldn't help but admire her. That was followed by a wheezing grunt as Hermione drove her elbow into his stomach. "What did we say about objectifying woman, Harry?"

Note to self: keep at least one girl between himself and Hermione at all times when admiring the fairer sex. The girl's elbows were ridiculously pointy.

"So... how exactly does this supposedly work?" Harry raised an eyebrow as he looked over at Su, who gestured back and forth between their bodies. "This supposed present of yours. It's obviously not something you got while buying everyone else's, or you would have given it to me at Daphne's house when I gave you yours. Or you'd be carrying it now and I'd be bugging you about why you have to give it to me in an empty room somewhere instead of our nice,

warm, comfortable common room. And since you can't go to Hogsmeade on weekends, there's no way you bought me something during the school year. So it's either handmade and you left it here over break or... actually, I can't even name another idea. And what does Tara have to do with any of this?"

Harry glanced over at Tara, who raised her hands in surrender and fell a step further back, clearly not intending to help him out in the least. "What do you know about Unbreakable Vows?"

"Jiānbùkěcuī de shìcí. You ask me to take an oath, I agree, my magic is bound to that promise, and if I ever break it I die."

Nodding, Harry cast a wordless Unlocking Charm at the door as he reached for the handle, creating the illusion that the unused classroom had been unlocked as he opened the door and ushered the pair inside. "Sounds about right. And so you're right, I don't have anything to give you in a physical sense. For Christmas I want to give you... the truth. If you want it. If not, I can send a letter home and tell Mum where the last of my allowance money is hidden along with what to get you. But... well, I can't say your secret from Malkin's isn't as important because I don't know what you stole, but I need an Unbreakable Vow from you before I can tell you what I'm hiding. Since Tara's the only person at Hogwarts who knows my secret, she's going to be our bonder."

Su looked uncertainly from Harry to Tara and back before straightening up and nodding. "Fine. But this better be a damn good secret if I'm passing up a Christmas present for it. Now how do we do this?"

"Well, start by holding out your arm..."

"...eighteen in an eleven-year-old's body and you've decided it sounds like fun to relive your old life and use your memories of the future to play chess with everyone around you, including your 'friends'. That's where the Mandarin comes in: you learned it from me last time and decided that I was a good enough friend the first time to come back for more of. And Tara, you've known about this since this summer and are not only going along with it but get some sort of strange laugh out of making Harry put up with you being around because you were a boy he hated in the other universe. Who was part of a plot that let Death Eaters into the castle and ended

with the headmaster being killed, so Harry probably was right to hate him." Narrowed violet eyes bored into Harry's with frightening intensity as Su stared him down. "Does that sound right?"

Harry nodded before opening his mouth to rebut the 'fun' part of her statement - really, he was here to prevent Voldemort from obtaining the Philosopher's Stone; any fun he had on the side was purely a bonus - but the sudden and harsh impact of a palm against his face turned his first word into an unintelligible cry of pain. Then Su slapped his unmarked cheek before slamming her palm into his chest and sending him sprawling to the floor. She stared at him with unmistakable contempt for a moment before turning and stalking out of the room.

Letting out a wheeze, Harry forced himself back to his feet. And that was precisely why he hadn't taken Su up on her offer of tai chi lessons in the other world: he had no particular fondness for being dumped on his ass over and over by a pint-sized girl. Working his jaw experimentally, he turned to Tara. "Well, that went well I think."

"...just out of curiosity, have you ever taken a bludger to the head during practice?"

"Welcome back to another year at Hogwarts. Literally, that is, not another school year. Although it does sometimes feel as if time flies that quickly. Alas, there are six more months of schoolwork in your future before this academic year comes to a close." There were a chorus of groans to accompany that and Dumbledore's eyes twinkled as he looked down at the student body from his seat at the head table. "Now, while I never wish to keep you from your nourishment - the reason I delayed these announcements from last night until tonight - there is one very important piece of information I feel I should share with you."

While the student body by and large continued to chatter, knowing at least the prefects would catch the message and relay it on if it was something that was actually of import to them, Harry waved his hand to shush his friends as he gave his full attention to Dumbledore. After all, this was another deviation in the timeline from his perspective. Nothing interesting had happened between his Christmas visits to the mirror and... wait. Was this where they would find out Snape was replacing Hooch for the February quidditch match between Gryffindor and Hufflepuff? Oh, that was no big deal then.

"...the upcoming Gryffindor versus Hufflepuff match will be postponed." Wait, what? That grabbed everyone's attention, not just Harry's, and the volume in the Great Hall quickly dropped to nothing. "Instead, the Hufflepuffs and the Slytherins will play on February 22nd, while the Gryffindors and Hufflepuffs instead play on May 2nd. The reason for the delay..." Here, Dumbledore paused for a moment, twinkling eyes wandering over the crowd before landing on Harry and Hermione. "...is that the Department of Magical Games and Sports heard about the most unorthodox gear and tactics used by our very own Gryffindors during their last game and is most eager to see both in action. Alas, several of the department's biggest names will be out of the country in February, so they have agreed instead to descend upon us in May. I hope you will all make them feel welcome. But now, Hogwarts, with an open heart and an empty stomach, I say unto you in the words of my friend Takeshi Kaga... allez manger!"

With a flourish of Dumbledore's hand, food appeared on the four long house tables and the volume immediately jumped to near deafening levels as the students dug in, eagerly discussing the news. Harry's fellow first years scattered up the table as the other six members of the quidditch team descended on their end, more than a

little excited by the news. "Bloody hell, Harry, do you know what this means?" Wood rubbed his hands together eagerly, too agitated to bother with the food on the table. "If they're sending the senior members of the DMGS... two or three of them are pro team owners. It'd be like being scouted. It'd be better than being scouted!"

Harry couldn't resist the urge to have a bit of fun at his captain's expense, knowing that playing keeper professionally was the boy's greatest ambition. "Actually to be fair, Wood? They're coming to scout Hermione and me. You're just sort of... there. They might even order you grounded for the match so they can see Hermione play keeper."

Blood draining from his face, Wood's jaw dropped. "Bloody hell. You're right." Frantically looking around the table, his eyes jumped from one member of the team to the next. "You two work better together so I couldn't just... wait... wait... Alicia! You trained with Charlie last year while you were just a reserve, right? So... you could replace Potter as seeker, and I could put a Weasley at chaser, and the wonder twins could be our beaters!" The Weasley twins shot Wood a glare that threatened horribly embarrassing retribution for such an act and he gulped before turning to the trio of chasers. "Or Alicia could take seeker, Angelina or Katie could sit, and they could be chasers?"

"That's not really fair to the others, though." The flowers in Hermione's transfigured hair wilted under the look Wood bestowed upon her before steeling herself and glaring, the leaves that formed her hair rustling angrily. "What? It's not! It's your fault you got knocked out last game and I played so well they want to see me. Why should the rest of the team get punished and shuffled because of you? No, I'm playing keeper or nothing. And if you don't want to lead from the bench for one game, you can explain to our visitors why they came all the way out here for nothing." Huffing, she turned away from Wood and began to pile food on her plate.

Harry could see the struggle playing out in Wood's mind... did he do what was best for himself by ensuring he was in the game as the keeper so he could be seen by these important men? Or did he do what was best for the team and house by riding the bench, since that was the only way for Hermione to start without shuffling most of the others? Harry decided to help his captain out a bit with the decision. "You're not going to change her mind."

Glancing back and forth between Hermione and Harry a few times, Wood slumped. "No?"

"She's stubborn. And she's right. It's not really fair. Plus Hermione and I are too small to be beaters, and I don't think I have the arm to be a chaser." Wood sighed in defeat and nodded, and Harry perked up as he went into his bag and pulled out a piece of parchment and a quill. "Now, since Hermione is going to be out on the pitch instead of you and will be calling plays for the chasers... I have a few ideas for you to look at."

Wood arched a brow as Harry sketched out a rough ellipse on the parchment, adding a trio of Xs to denote the players before putting them into motion using his wand. "I didn't know you paid enough attention to the chasers during practice to try your hand at making up plays for them, Potter..."

Shrugging, Harry added the opposing team's chasers and animated them as well before looking up. "I don't. This maniac who shall remains nameless releases five snitches simultaneously and won't let me leave until I catch them all. It keeps me a bit busy. That doesn't mean I can't know a few things about the position, though. You remember who my dad is, right? James Potter, star chaser of Gryffindor from '84 to '88? Would have gone pro after school if he hadn't decided being an auror was more important because of the war?" Wood nodded and Harry sighed in relief at the acceptance of his flimsy story. Ginny was the one who'd actually created these plays, not his father, but after what he'd gone through with her... well, he didn't exactly feel horrible about stealing her intellectual property to claim as his own. "Now, this is something I came up with to keep our girls from being called for blatching when the other team tries the Hawkshead Attacking Formation against us. It's called Catch, and..."

Pushing open the door, Harry led his two companions into a small room that was home to nothing but a simple table with seven bottles of various sizes and shapes standing on it in a line. As soon as Su crossed the threshold, Harry began counting; after two seconds, the expected purple flames sprang up behind them with the black fire blocking the doorway leading onward bursting to life exactly three seconds later. "Hmm. Stuff in bottles. Snape's room, I'm guessing."

Hermione stepped forward and, just like the first time, picked up the roll of parchment lying next to the bottles. Opening it, she read it aloud for them. "Danger lies before you, while safety lies behind. Two of us will help you, whichever you would find. One among us seven will let you move ahead, another will transport the drinker back instead. Two among our number hold only nettle wine, three of us are killers, waiting hidden in line. Choose, unless you wish to stay here forevermore, to help you in your choice, we give you these clues four. First, however slyly the poison tries to hide, you will always find some on nettle wine's left side. Second, different are those who stand at either end, but if you would move onward, neither is your friend. Third, as you see clearly, all are different size, neither dwarf nor giant holds death in their insides. Fourth, the second left and the second on the right are twins once you taste them, though different at first sight." Turning to Harry, she let out a genuine laugh as she waved the parchment at him. "It's a logic puzzle. The perfect defense against most wizards; they haven't got an ounce of logic and would be stuck in here forever."

"Snape's a half-blood, so he'd both know that and know how to take advantage of it." Leaning against the wall beside the doorway full of purple flames, Harry caught Su's eye before shaking his head. He did have the solution, yes, but Hermione could figure it out and so he'd keep his mouth shut for now. "So, Hermione, which one do we drink?"

"Well give me a minute, won't you?" Hermione read the parchment several times, walking up and down the line of bottles as she muttered to herself softly. Finally, she grabbed the smallest bottle and lifted it high. "This will get us through the black flames. Except... there's only enough here for one of us, Harry. Maybe two if we take really small sips."

Harry took the bottle and examined it for a moment before passing it to Su. "You know what to do." The diminutive Chinese girl nodded before knocking back the potion in the tiny bottle. Her skin took on an unnatural, bluish-white cast for a moment before returning to normal, and then Su was diving through the wall of black flames. Turning his attention back to Hermione, he raised his wand. "Do you trust me?"

Scoffing, Hermione gave him a gentle - for her - kick in the shin. "Considering where we are and why we're here, do you really need to ask that?"

Right then. Waving his wand once over Hermione's body, Harry quickly cast a Flame-Freezing Charm on her before doing the same to himself. "I just cast a charm over the two of us that will either allow us to pass through the flames unharmed or... well, let's not think about that." Suddenly Hermione didn't look so sure of things and Harry rolled his eyes. "C'mon. Su can't hold off Quirrell on her own forever, you know."

Nodding decisively, Hermione took a deep breath before charging towards the wall of black flames Su had disappeared through. She passed through it easily and Harry was only a few steps behind her, wand at the ready as he moved to join Su and Hermione behind the rippling bronze shield that was doing its best to absorb the abuse Quirrell was handing out. His arrival caught their attacker's attention and the barrage of spells slackened and died as the professor stared at them with a mixture of curiosity, uncertainty, and annoyance. "Potter! I wondered who had led these two down here. What are you doing here? Where are Longbottom and his friends?"

"They're a bit busy lying in the corridor upstairs. We stunned them on the way in. Sorry. You'll have to deal with us instead." He and Su were a bit more prepared for this than Hermione was, but Harry was confident that they'd manage to pull through. After all, he'd already done it once and if things got really nasty... well, he knew plenty of ways to dispatch Quirrell in a hurry. Slipping into the sideways combat stance he'd come to prefer, Harry looked to his left. "Ready, Su?"

Nodding, Su waved her wand in a wide arc and collapsed her shield, completing the motion by bringing her wand back up to rest against her chest. Then the tip began to glow a brilliant red and Hermione let out a soft gasp as Su started whipping it back and forth in front of herself in a series of tight, controlled motions as she drew a pair of glowing red hàn zì in midair in front of them. Finishing her work, Su used a flick of her wand to rotate it to face Quirrell before stabbing her wand into the center of her creation. "Huǒ gōng!" The hàn zì collapsed in on itself, turning into a tiny, flickering ball of flame that seemed innocent enough until it burst into a torrent of fire that roared towards Quirrell. "Go, you guys!"

While they'd been unable to practice per say, not knowing exactly where Quirrell would be when they arrived in the final room, Harry and Su had gone over a number of possibilities. And this was the best of them: Su's spell had the tradeoff of power versus casting time but since Quirrell had been nice - or rather stupid - enough to let her finish casting it, she was now the proud owner of a magical flamethrower that she could maintain for at least half an hour, sometimes more. That meant he would be responsible for shielding the girls in between offensive barrages meant to keep Quirrell too busy to attack Su and Hermione, and Hermione herself... "Head for the mirror, Hermione! I'll cover you!"

Panting, Harry shot upright in his bed.

What... the hell... was that?

"Harry?"

"Hmm?"

"What did you do to Su?" Looking up from the transfiguration essay he was hard at work on, Harry raised an eyebrow but Hermione was undeterred. "She's avoiding us. Or, more specifically, she's been avoiding you since we got back to Hogwarts and that means we haven't really seen her except for around the dorm in over a week because we spend most of our time near you. So now you have two choices: tell me why she's sitting at a table other than ours or put up with me kicking you under the table until you do."

Sitting silently, Harry waited for Hermione to lash out with her foot, neatly trapping it between his legs. When she tried a follow-up kick using the other leg, he was ready for her. "Locomotor mortis!" Her legs snapped together and Harry took a moment to enjoy the astonished look on her face before swishing and flicking his wand. "Violentwenchium Leviosa." Ever so carefully, he lifted her feet into the air and moved them to rest on Daphne's lap, forcing Hermione to twist in her seat - and curse - to keep from tipping over. "You were saying?"

Hermione scowled. "I am so kicking your ass later. And this doesn't get you out of owing me... us... an explanation about Su. Right girls?"

On the other side of Daphne, Tracey finally looked up from her own essay, blinking at Hermione before glancing over at where Su was working at her own library table and kept company by a blonde and another girl with black hair. "Actually, I'm just curious who the blonde is. I recognize Cho Chang and the two of them probably get along because they're both Chinese, but I've only ever seen Cho talk to one person outside of class and the blonde isn't her."

Nudging the blonde beside him, Harry waited for Tara to meet his gaze before nodding towards Su and her friends. Tara looked over before rolling her eyes and sighing. "What, you think that because I'm a sneaky Slytherin and such that I know everything about everyone in the school?" Harry just waited her out, eventually being rewarded with another sigh. "Jessica Wòng. Half-blood, three-quarters English and one-quarter Chinese. Her mother was the undersecretary to Hong Kong's Minister of Magic all the way up until 1997. Her father serves in the Royal Navy. Father hates her because after the job she did in Hong Kong, Minister Fudge tends to actually listen to what she has to say when she opens her mouth and she and Father don't exactly see eye to eye."

Hmm. Staring across the library at the trio of girls, Harry waited until Jessica looked up and met her brown eyes for a moment before looking away. Apart from a slightly 'off' - by British standards, at any rate - skintone and eyes similar in shape to Cho and Su's, the girl looked like your average blonde Hogwarts student. Maybe that was how she'd escaped Su's notice during her initial survey on the train? Then something slammed into his knees and Harry hissed, gaze jumping back to Hermione, who grinned at him smugly before delivering another two-footed kick to his knees. "They need to invent some sort of magical shock collar that goes off every time you're violent towards someone who doesn't deserve it."

"Yeah, but you deserve it right now so I'd be safe." Hermione aimed another kick at his knees and Harry twisted to one side, causing her to curse as she kicked the underside of his chair hard. "Harry: Su. Explain. Now."

Harry debated how to half-ass an answer so he was neither technically lying nor actually telling the truth. Because he couldn't do the latter without an Unbreakable Vow from each girl and he really didn't want to risk being stuck with only Tara for company because the others reacted as badly as Su to what he'd been hiding. Finally, he settled on what he thought was a decent reply. "Back when Su and I first met, I let slip something I shouldn't have. She traded me a piece of information about herself as a way of showing me she wouldn't betray me, because then I could get her in trouble too. But she told me that one day she'd want to know the whole story... and on the night we got back from winter hols, I gave it to her."

Letting out an indelicate snort, Hermione eyed him. "She's pissed off at you to the point that she's avoiding all of us because of some weird secret you've been hiding from her that you finally came clean about? Right. Pull the other one, Harry."

"I'm... not serious, because I don't want Tara making a joke. But I'm not kidding, Hermione. To quote a great - albeit odd and sometimes misguided - man... the truth: it is a beautiful and terrible thing, and must therefore be treated with great caution."

"So... you know what, I'm actually curious what inane excuse you might have ready for me considering how I found the two of you, Lily. Come on. What's it going to be? Were the two of you working together to come up with the curriculum for a new course up at Hogwarts so parents don't need to give The Talk anymore? Maybe you tripped and landed on top of her on the sofa with your hands down the neckline of her dress? Or are we finally going to be having the truth this evening?"

Winced at her husband's sharp tone, Lily looked down the length of the sofa she was sitting on to where Narcissa was staring at her nails as if they held the secrets of life, the universe, and everything. When she realized she wouldn't be getting any help from that quarter, Lily sighed and turned her attention back to her husband. "I don't suppose I can go with 'it's not what it looks like'?" James shook his head and Lily furrowed her brow in thought for a moment before shrugging helplessly. "Well, then it's pretty obvious, isn't it?"

James opened his mouth to reply, only to be cut off as Narcissa decided that she did in fact feel like adding her two knuts to the conversation. "I don't suppose you'll believe that she caught me

breaking into your house for some nefarious purpose and you flooded in just as she finally managed to subdue me? The muggle way, since I knocked her wand away at some point?"

"And her hands were on your breasts... why, exactly?"

"Well I don't expect you to understand seeing as how you don't have a pair, but they're fairly sensitive for most women. Having them touched tends to distract us." Tilting her head to one side, Narcissa stared off into space. "Hmm. Do you think the Ministry would approve that as an official auror technique when subduing women? I bet it'd work wonderfully."

Doing her best not to laugh, Lily watched as her husband's face shifted through various shades of red. "I don't... that is... no! I remember how you distracted everyone on Halloween by distracting me, and I'm not going to let you do the same thing here. Because that's not what was going on and you both know it. Bloody hell, at this point I think half of my coworkers know what's going on here."

That got Lily's attention in a hurry. "...what?"

James let out a derisive snort and then pointed up at the ceiling. "Did you forget what darling Dora is in training to do for a living? Aurors are required to learn occlumency. She's close to last in her class at it. Which means that most of the auror trainers have seen at least one of the times she's walked in on you. At least they were nice enough to tell me about it... not that it was news, mind you, but still. It's a sad day when your coworkers show you more respect than the girl who's your daughter in all but blood."

"Calling what you did for any of these kids 'parenting' is a bit of a stretch, James." Then Lily's brain ran back over the next to last thing he'd said and she paled. "Wait. You knew before your coworkers told you? How?"

Reaching up, James tapped the frame of his glasses with one finger. "I have bad eyesight, Lily. I'm not blind. Combine that with the fact that I'm a damned auror captain... it's not exactly hard to move around the house unseen when the only other people in it are distracted with each other. I've known ever since I came home early from a shift... two years ago? Two and a half, maybe? Somewhere in there."

Lily's jaw dropped. Holy crap. That was pretty much as long as she'd been seeing Narcissa. But if that was the case... "Why didn't you ever say anything?"

"Why didn't you try and fix things with me before running off behind my back? One of the trainers who came to me is a half-blood; when we were talking about what he saw in Dora's memories, he mentioned that muggles have this thing called 'marital therapy'. Something where a couple goes to see someone trained to help them with their problems? I refuse to believe that you of all people didn't know it existed." James stared at her accusingly and for the first time in many a year, Lily found herself struggling to come up with the answer to a question.

He was right. She should have told him she was unhappy, Lily realized. And if they hadn't been able to work things out on their own from there, she should have thought of something like professional counseling. But she'd done neither. Why? "I did. And... I don't know. I'd say 'because you were never home' or something snippy like that, but even I'll admit that's just an excuse."

The anger seemed to seep out of James as he turned away and slumped into an armchair. "Yeah. What's done is done at this point. Even if you did end your relationship with Narcissa today, I think it's safe to say the damage is more than done. How can I trust you around... well, anyone? This is proof that Selene wasn't just 'a phase' like you'd always claimed she was. So now whenever you spend time around anyone of either gender, that little part of my brain is going to be left wondering if I'm being played for a fool again." Then James tensed up for a moment before waving his hand dismissively. "On the other hand, at this point I'm not entirely innocent either..."

...so he didn't have time for his own wife and family, but he had time for some tart on the side? Lily placed her hands on the sofa cushion, ready to push herself to her feet and unleash a torrent of righteous anger when it hit her. How much of his 'working late' over the last two years actually had been a need to work, and how much of it had been him avoiding the house at night so he wouldn't have to deal with this exact conversation? After a few seconds of batting that one around in her head, Lily settled for scowling at him petulantly. She'd save genuine anger for after she heard what he had to say. "Oh?"

Either oblivious to her anger or perhaps just not caring, James simply shrugged in response. "I figured if you could have a bit on the side, why should I keep turning down all the women at work who flirted with me? Her name is Sheena, she's twenty-four, and she's the DMLE's Special Consultant for Herbological Matters. Sometimes when I 'work late' I'm at her flat in London, other times I'm actually working late. But as best I can tell from the wards' logs, you have Narcissa over about three times more often than I see Sheena. Well, outside of work that is. So as much as you probably want to, I'm not really seeing how you have a right to complain."

Lily opened and closed her mouth a few times before slumping back against the sofa. He was right and she knew it. He was guilty of infidelity but so was she, and to a far more severe degree if he was telling the truth. What made the whole thing even worse was that she couldn't do anything about it. Neither of them could. If he tried to exercise his right as a lord of the Wizengamot to annul their marriage on account of her copious amounts of adultery, she could out his affair and his own standing would tumble. The reverse was true if she tried to out him and Sheena. And divorce wasn't a word the wizarding world was familiar with, meaning there was no way for them to peacefully separate and pursue happiness elsewhere. "So where do we go from here, James? I'm cheating on you, you're cheating on me, neither of us is happy with that but neither of us is happy with our marriage..."

"Actually, if you'd remembered to take your potions and it was still just the two of us... but that's neither here nor there, is it? As for where we go from here? The only place we can go, Lily. Gryffindors go forward. This weekend, we'll sit down and figure out how to handle that Narcissa and Sheena will be coming and going... and Sheena will be getting keyed into the wards. Unless you want me to block Narcissa from entering the manor, that is?" Damn. He had a point. And to be honest, she was a bit curious to meet the woman who had caught her husband's attention. "Then we need to tell the children what's going on, because..." Lily blushed at that, James trailing off as he noticed. "The kids know already, don't they?"

Shaking her head, Lily ticked off the house's underage residents on her fingers. "Jasmine and Rose don't, or at least I don't think they do. Harry does and is fine with it; he's actually taken to calling Narcissa 'Mother' because he thinks it's funny for some reason. Oh, and Tara

knows too and calls me 'Mum' because I think hearing it from someone who's not actually my child is bloody odd and she knows it so she enjoys tormenting me with it."

James let out a sigh at that, reaching up to pinch the bridge of his nose. "Well isn't that just lovely. In that case, hey, let's just have Sheena and Narcissa over for dinner on Sunday night. We can tell the kids all about how they now have a Mum and a Dad and a Mother and a Mom and we'll be one big happy fucking family." Rising from his seat, he turned and stalked off towards the stairs. "I would love to have a drink right now, but I have work early tomorrow and hangover potions always leave me feeling off. Lily, if you could not make any noise when you finally decide to sneak into our bed, I'd appreciate it. Good night."

Silence descended as James disappeared down the hallway, although Narcissa didn't allow it to last long. "Well, that could have gone worse." Lily gave her a disbelieving look and the older woman shrugged defensively. "Okay, so your husband has known about our affair for the last two years, and evidently he resents your children's existence, and sure he's having an affair of his own, but..." Trailing off, Narcissa frowned. "Okay, I take it back. I'm not sure how that could have gone much worse."

"...thanks, Cissy."

"You know, this is almost as good as what I'm used to at home. Which makes it ten times better than your average English take-away Chinese. Where'd you get it?"

"Here at the school, actually. I gave the recipes to the house elves and had them make it a few times for me first. According to them, the secret ingredient is sending an elf to the Zhenjiang District for some really good black vinegar. Well, that and cat." Su stopped with her chopsticks halfway to her mouth, staring at him in horror, and Harry grinned. "What? You've seen the size of the average cat that a student brings to Hogwarts. Compare that to a house elf. When I told them I wanted some sweet and sour spare ribs for you, they jumped at the chance to make a few of their worst enemies... disappear."

Calmly placing her chopsticks on the table, Su slowly drew her wand before pointing it at Harry across the table. "If you just fed me cat... I

don't care if you really are eighteen, know a lot of magic, and defeated the You-Know-Who of your world a few times. My grandparents taught me a few spells that even Madam Pomfrey won't be able to reverse and you're getting hit with one of them."

Harry raised his hands in surrender. "Would I really do that to someone I'm trying to apologize to?" Su considered that for a moment before placing her wand on the top of the table and taking her chopsticks back up, a vaguely suspicious look still gracing her face. "Seriously, I'm eating from the same serving plates as you. And despite what Tara might say about me having weird tastes in food, I don't eat cat." It wasn't until Harry took another bite of the pork ribs that she started eating again, and their private dinner descended back into silence for a few minutes. Considering why Harry was there, though, that wasn't an acceptable state of affairs. "So..."

"You do realize I'm a girl, right? Free food doesn't get you out of trouble, it just makes my tummy full." Su paused for a moment, raising her chopsticks so she could tap their ends against one of the red and gold enameled hair sticks she was using to keep her long black hair pinned up in a bun. Originally purchased to use as a backup gift in case she declined to take a vow and learn the truth as a Christmas present, Harry had wrapped them up inside the letter inviting her to their private dinner. When she'd shown up with them in her hair, he'd taken it as a sign that she was accepting his apology. Given the expression on her face, though... "And I'm not a niffler, either. Shiny things are nice but they're just that: things."

Grimacing, Harry took a few bites of food to stall as he collected his thoughts before deciding to try again. "Well in my defense, the only person I've ever had to really apologize to in my life is my world's Luna, and that generally consisted of the strangest knickknack I could find at the time followed by makeup sex. I was pretty sure that wouldn't work in this case, so I'm taking a bit of a shot in the dark here." Su let out a snort of laughter at that. "And besides, you're awfully angry at me but here's a question for you. How would you have handled it in my position? Would you have walked up to your last and only friend in your old world in the middle of a store and gone 'Hi, I'm Li Su, I'm actually eighteen and only look eleven because I came back in time to save the world again. You were my friend last time; wanna be my friend again?' Because if you can

honestly say yes to that, I definitely know why the Sorting Hat here put you in Gryffindor and not Ravenclaw."

Su's chewing slowed and then she swallowed before inclining her head in acquiescence. "Okay, fine, I guess you have a point. I would have kept it to myself too. I guess I don't get... why pick me? Tara's your cousin and you told me your mother and two others know. Other family members?" Harry nodded. "Then why me? What makes me special? We all knew there was something different about you, but now that I know the truth... just spending time around the others is so frustrating! They sit and guess and gossip and come up with all these ridiculous theories, and here I know the truth... and I can't even tell them they're wrong because I know if I do, then they'll want to know what I know that they don't."

While he did sympathize somewhat with her plight, Harry couldn't help but roll his eyes. "Oh no, I have no idea what that's like at all. And Tara certainly never had to deal with exactly what you're talking about. Which reminds me... Daphne mentioned that you never agreed with the others when they gossiped about who I was sneaking off to snog. Why not?"

"Harry? You're surrounded by five girls. Four of us like boys. Out of those four, I can safely say at least three of the four would be up for dating or even just some light snogging for fun if you asked. It could be four out of four; I've never been able to read Tara well. At any rate, it's safe to say that if you wanted it, you could be getting it without sneaking off. So that probably wasn't what you were doing." Su blushed faintly and returned her attention to her dinner for a few more bites before continuing. "Anyways, you do have a good point. I should talk to Tara about this. I mean, she's had to deal with it since we all got here in September and... well, I can't exactly be mad at her considering she was bound under an Unbreakable Vow not to tell me."

Harry let out a noncommittal hum at that; while he did want everyone back together and friendly towards one another, drama between Su and Tara might have kept Tara off her game enough to keep her harassment of him to a minimum. Oh well. "And to answer your earlier question - why you, that is - the truth is... oh wait, you ran off before we got to the oneiromancy part, didn't you?" Su blinked owlishly at him. "Do you know what oneiromancy is at least?" That earned him a shake of her head. "Well, if you want the

definition that you'll find in Unfogging the Future... 'oneiromancy is a form of divination based upon dreams; it is a system of dream interpretation that uses dreams to predict the future'. Assuming this Trelawney uses the same lesson plans as mine did, you end up keeping a dream diary for a month during fifth year and using The Dream Oracle to try and make sense of it all."

Proving that the intellect that had gotten her sorted into Ravenclaw in his old world was still present, Su quickly cottoned on to the fact that he was leaving something unsaid. "Hmm. So, since you're bringing it up in the first place, I think it's safe to assume you have the ability. But you go out of your way to point out that the definition you give me is from a book. Which says to me that... maybe your ability isn't the same?"

"Ten points to Gryffindor for impeccable logic. As best I can tell, there's nothing to interpret in my dreams. I'm just seeing odd little pieces of the future, or rather several different possible futures that might come true. Like Luna, who you met at Daphne's house? I've seen different futures for her, where she's sorted into Gryffindor, Ravenclaw, or Slytherin. I've seen ones where Hermione ends up dating my sister Jasmine, or my other sister Rose, or even some French bird I've never met before." Technically the truth there; he'd never met Gabrielle Delacour here, nor had he really 'met' her in the old world apart from saving her during the Triwizard Tournament. Suddenly, something occurred to Harry and he grinned as he pointed his chopsticks at Su's torso. "Oh, and if you're as jealous of Tracey as the rest of the girls seem to be? Well, you're not going to catch up to her without using a potion or ritual of some kind, but you do pretty well for yourself in every future I've seen so far."

Blushing faintly, Su reached out to bat at his chopsticks. "Don't point at someone with your chopsticks, Harry, it's really rude. And for the record no, I'm not one of the jealous ones. Tracey already complains about the pain of doing stairs with her... gifts. If I had a choice, that's one gift I would try and return for a refund." Placing her chopsticks back on the table, Su dabbed at the corner of her mouth daintily before eyeing Harry. "We're getting a bit off topic, though, aren't we? What did you see that made you think I needed to be told at all, much less now?"

Harry took a moment to push his bowl and the serving platters off to one side before drawing his wand, waving it over the center of the

table and conjuring a replica of the Philosopher's Stone. "This is what's hiding at the end of a certain corridor on the Third Floor: the Philosopher's Stone that made Nicholas Flamel famous. And the threat of 'most painful death' isn't going to stop Voldemort from going after it."

"Wait, what?" Reaching forward, Su scooped up the Philosopher's Stone and examined it closely. "Dumbledore is hiding this somewhere in the third floor corridor? And You-Know-Who is going to come here after it?"

Nodding, Harry took the fake stone back from Su and vanished it. Granted his creation was nothing more than a paperweight, but if the wrong person saw it... awkward questions would be asked. "Yes. And since I haven't seen anything to make me think otherwise, I have to assume that this Dumbledore is working the same way mine is, and has set all this up so that Longbottom can get a trial run at being a hero again now that he's old enough to actually remember it. Start building him up for Voldemort's inevitable return. But... well, you've met the boy. Do you want him to be the last line of defense between Voldemort and a new body?" Su shook her head frantically. "Same here. I know what to look for, how to tell Voldemort's making his move... I was going to do it on my own, but lately I've been seeing dreams of you and Hermione coming with me. I don't know why I'd do something like that but until I can figure that out, I have to assume there's a reason and that I'll do it when the time comes. I didn't want you going into things blind, I didn't want to make up a whole new round of lies... so I decided to tell you the truth."

"Which is a bit selfish of you, if you think about it. You decided you were 'doing me a favor' by telling me the truth, but you're only doing it because you're planning to drag me into something incredibly dangerous and don't want me running around like a headless chicken." Well when Su put it like that, Harry to admit it didn't really sound all that great. Bugger. Su just shook her head. "You know what, I take back what I said earlier. There is nothing wrong with things. You're buying me a few when you go home at the end of the year. Because everyone else got nice gifts for Christmas and what did I get? You decided to turn my world upside down, then dropped this whole 'you're going to get to meet You-Know-Who' thing on me. That's just not cricket."

Harry chuckled at that, only to trail off when he realized something. "You grew up in China, right? And only arrived in Essex this past summer?" Su nodded. "For someone who probably didn't speak it much growing up, your English is amazing. You know idioms, your accent is almost non-existent..."

Looking a bit sheepish, Su interrupted him by holding up her left hand, the light glinting off the rather large sapphire set into the gold ring on her middle finger. Harry had noticed it before but never really gone out of his way to inspect it. As he watched Su slide it off her finger, he found himself wondering if that had been a mistake. "Wǒ zhī dào yīng yǔ ma? Shuí shuō de?" I know English? Says who?

Was she really saying what Harry thought she was saying? Taking the ring from Su, he ran his finger along the nearly illegible hànzi etched into the metal surrounding the sapphire. "...nǐ néng bù néng shuō yīng yǔ?" ...can you speak English?

"Bù kě yǐ." Nope.

Huh. Nothing in his dreams had warned him that one was coming. Reaching out, Harry slid the ring back on to Su's finger but before he released her hand, something occurred to him and he quirked one brow. "So, three out of the four straight Angels would snog me... and Tara's that fourth one. So does that mean what I think it does, Miss Li?"

Scoffing, Su pulled her hand away. "Not anymore. It made you mysterious and interesting when we thought you were eleven. Now... you're what, twice my age?"

Ouch. Harry was almost offended... and then he realized that she was in fact an eleven-year-old girl and he had no interest in snogging with her either.

But still.

Ouch.

Leaning back into one of the squishy red armchairs that dotted the Gryffindor common room, Daphne rested her chin in her palm and used her other hand to flip through the catalog that Oriens's had owled up to Hogwarts for her, moving from the feline section into the avian one. Ooh, birds of prey. An owl as a familiar seemed rather silly to her, seeing as how her family owned several that she could use when at home and the school had an owlery full of birds the students could use. On the other hand, some sort of hawk, falcon, or eagle could probably be trained to carry messages around school while significantly improving her own intimidation factor.

Slight of form and the shortest member of their little group - heck, barring a massive growth spurt, that weird girl Luna would be taller than her when she joined them at Hogwarts that fall - Daphne was well aware that it was only her first night's encounter with Longbottom that insulated her from some of the same bullying and harassment that Megan and Anne reported dealing with when they wandered the school alone. Eventually, though, the Slytherins would start getting braver and she was a very tempting target: the physically unimposing Gryffindor daughter of a disgraced pureblood line that had previously been purely Slytherin. There were no limits on where familiars were allowed to go aside from not being allowed in classrooms when class was in session. But who would be stupid enough to pick on her if she had a great big ruddy falcon riding around on her shoulder?

Suddenly, a familiar and yet alien sound caught her attention and it took Daphne a moment to place it: Su was speaking in Chinese. Mandarin. Considering even Su sometimes slipped when it came to keep the names straight, Daphne had given up even trying. But considering there was only one other person in their house who could speak her native language, either she was talking to herself or... Daphne cocked her head to the side, listening. One voice, two voice, boy voice, girl voice. Su and Harry were talking again, apparently.

Daphne wasn't sure what to think about that. As mean as it was, she'd actually been glad to see Harry and Su feuding. Their shared talent in a foreign language none of the rest of them knew made spying on their conversations nigh impossible, Daphne was honest enough to admit that Su was smarter and more powerful than her, and the Lis' globe-spanning holdings made the Greengrass family look like the Weasleys. If Harry actually did decide to take her

advice and marry for money and political power instead of love, Su was definitely a better candidate than her and that was without even leaving their little group.

On the other hand, considering Su seemed to be the one furthest from Harry with even Tracey spending more one-on-one time with him, perhaps it wasn't a concern. Maybe Su had a contract already. Maybe Su didn't intend to go down that road at all. Maybe Su didn't even like boys and that was why she spent most of her time with Hermione.

Not that any of those scenarios got Daphne any closer to her goal: convincing Harry that his father should sign the contract that hers had sent back in December.

And now Su was back and taking up valuable Harry time she could be using to try and do so.

Phooey.

Sometimes, she found herself wondering who actually ran their house these days: her or her too mature, dimension traveling, future seeing son.

Taking a sip from her cup of tea, Lily lifted the letter in front of her and reviewed what little she was being told ahead of time about the unknown - to her, at least - girl that Harry had requested she find a way to invite over for the day. Lara Ramsay, a half-blood Hufflepuff-to-be from Glasgow. According to Harry, he'd met her through Luna in his native universe but the blonde had never told him how the two had met. With the revelation that this Luna had been almost completely isolated from children her own age, though, he wanted to cover his bases since she was supposed to become a part of his group again when she arrived at school - at least according to his dreams.

Idly, Lily wondered if he ever dreamed about anything useful. All six numbers for a winning Thunderball ticket, maybe?

Hmm. What else? 'Full on piebald with bad eyesight, at least one white streak in her hair and maybe more, and spots of discolored skin. Does not react well to being mocked for it. At all.' Lily hummed softly to herself; she'd already warned the girls about it but she'd

remind them when they came down. Her eyes scanned down a bit further and she shook her head in dismay. 'From the middle of Glasgow. Idolizes her foul-mouthed uncle. Swears like a sailor.' It was bad enough that Hermione's mouth was starting to rub off on her daughters, but another bad influence? Hmmph. 'Do not, under any circumstances, talk to her about her musical interests. Unless you like bagpipes.' Why as a matter of fact... no, not a chance. 'Learned to cook from aforementioned uncle. Free kitchen helper if you ask nicely.' Well, that would be nice. She'd grown spoiled by Harry's help that summer and over break; it would be nice to have another set of hands in the kitchen with her again. Not that it made up for the bagpipes and the profanity...

Lily shook her head, her eyes drifting down to the bottom of the page, where Harry had offered a few suggestions for setting the day up. She'd taken two of them: she'd not only invited Lara over to spend the afternoon and evening, but Cassie as well. Sirius had yet to commit to the Beauxbatons option and so they had to assume until they knew otherwise that their efforts had failed; including Cassie would give her the chances to make friends with one of the girls she'd be attending school with, while using Lara herself as a method of forcing the twins to accept Cassie's presence. Pure brilliance, in Lily's opinion, although she was surprised he was actually sparing Cassie any thought. She wasn't someone he'd known in his old world, Sirius somehow ending up a prisoner of Azkaban and then an outlaw and dying childless, so it wasn't a case akin to Lara's. Something to ask when he came home at the end of the year, perhaps?

Personally, Lily was surprised the Ramsays were willing to ship Lara off to the house of complete strangers, having never once met the people who'd be watching their daughter. She'd just sent the invitation for a 'small gathering to allow children of several families to meet' off with Silver Star, receiving a quick acceptance letter scribbled on a piece of spiral-bound notebook paper in blue ink three days later. Then again, she was 'Lady Potter', head of a noteworthy and traditionally light-aligned family. It probably hadn't occurred to the magical parent that such a person could possibly want to do harm to their daughter, and they had convinced their non-magical spouse.

Jasmine came skidding into the kitchen with her Cleansweep thrown over one shoulder, Rose a few steps behind at a more sedate pace.

Chuckling at the slowly deviating personalities her two daughters were starting to display, Lily gestured for them to join her at the table in the breakfast nook. Once they were seated, she offered them a biscuit from the plateful she'd made before launching into a conversation she wanted to have one more time before guests came to the house. "Now, when Cassie and Lara get here..."

The way Rose raised her hand primly, like a student waiting to be called on, made Lily bite her lip to avoid laughing. Her son had told her about his friends in the other universe, including what his Hermione had been like when they first met. How it had seeped through from this Hermione to her daughter was a mystery but... there it was. Lily pointed at the younger of her two daughters and Rose cleared her throat. "We have to do our best to include Cassie too even though we don't like her, and we're not allowed to repeat anything we hear Lara say just because you don't yell at Lara for saying it. Oh, and no making fun of Lara's glasses or skin or hair because she was born that way and it's not her fault."

"And we have to keep our mouths shut about certain things because they're nobody's business but our family's, especially since if we tell someone who tells someone else, then soon everyone would know and it would be a huge mess for all of us?" Jasmine glanced over at the floo, or more specifically at where her father's spare auror cloak hung beside an emerald green cloak on the rack beside the fireplace. "Like that you have a girlfriend, or that Dad does too and she's one of the people he works with. And can I just say that I'm going to be working extra hard to hide this whole 'four parent family' secret from the world, and not just because you promised me my own Nimbus if I could keep quiet all the way until we go school shopping again? I don't know about Rose, but having it explained to me made my head hurt. I don't want to be stuck explaining it to someone who finds out from me."

Snorting, Rose shook her head. "I understand it. Not that it makes the idea of explaining the whole 'no divorce, both parents cheating, three mums and a dad' mess to someone sound any more fun. Mostly because I think you're all mad for doing this. I mean, I know we own a couple of other houses. We've spent time in Godric's Hollow, and there's that house in London that Dad won off Uncle Sirius when he was 'most definitely not out playing poker and drinking until half three in the morning'. We need the manor more; you should have shipped him and Sheena off somewhere else. Well,

not that I mind Sheena. She's like Dora, except she actually talks to us and doesn't treat us like we're six. The big sister we should have had... which makes the fact that she's sleeping with Dad a lot weirder, now that I think about it. Bleh. Can we just kick Dad out and adopt her or something?"

Lily raised the paper in her hand just enough to hide her smile. While the girls had taken the news of their parents' respective affairs relatively calmly and taken to Sheena well enough, it hadn't done much to improve their opinion of James. Granted he was putting in more frequent appearances these days, but he still did a minority of the parenting and it didn't make up for years of absenteeism either. Thankfully, she was saved from having to answer that one by the fire flaring the beautiful green color characteristic of floo travel. Setting her cup and Harry's letter down, she rose to greet the new arrival, noting the ducked head crowned with long, straight brown hair. Cassie. The girl she regarded as her third daughter - or perhaps fourth, now that Narcissa and Tara were a part of her life - straightened up, curtsying as she smiled shyly. "Good afternoon, Aunt Lily."

"Cassie. You obviously know the twins. You might want to step forward; we're still expecting at least one more person and..." Lily trailed off as the fire flared green again, this time disgorging a girl who went skidding across the floor, rolling twice before coming to a stop. Cassie let out a squeak of surprise, jumping to one side to let the girl pass, and Lily rushed over to check on the new arrival, cringing at the torrent of profanity - in both English and Gàidhlig - that erupted from the girl. "Don't use the floo much, I take it?"

Her tirade coming to an end, the girl let out a huff of breath to blow a mix of golden blonde and shockingly white hair out of her face before pushing herself up on her elbows and looking around. "No, I use the floo plenty. It just hates me every time." Meeting Lily's concerned gaze with eyes a bit closer to olive than the older woman's own green, Lara let out a chuckle. "You must be Lady Potter. Thanks for inviting me."

Lily let out a laugh of her own before offering the girl a hand and pulling Lara to her feet. "Don't feel bad, my son is just as bad and he's both older and a more frequent flooer than you." And good Lord was Lara's accent thick. Lily had previously sworn that the worst time she'd ever have deciphering a Scottish accent was the time

she'd listened to Professor McGonagall tear into the Marauders for a particularly bad prank in seventh year. Lara was almost that bad when calm; she couldn't even imagine what the girl would sound like when mad. Shaking her head, she gestured to the table in the kitchen nook where her daughters were waiting, waving her wand over each girl as they passed. As soon as the two girls were seated, Lily headed for the kitchen, her wand quickly bringing a pot of water to boil so they too could have tea. "Please, call me Lily. Or if you end up visiting a lot, Aunt Lily. Lady Potter was my thoroughly unpleasant mother-in-law, God rest her soul."

"Oh. Okay, erm, Lily. Nice to meet you." Lara looked around the table, the corner of her mouth quirking up. "Now, if I had to guess... the twin gingers are yours and the Victorian Party Cindy is the outsider that makes it all 'several families'?"

Filling four cups resting on a nearby tray, Lily nodded. "My daughters Jasmine and Rose - Jasmine has a few more freckles than Rose because she spends more time outside if you want to try your hand at telling them apart - and their cousin Cassiopeia Black. Cassie, for short." As she moved the teapot to the tray and headed over to the table, Lily's eyes wandered over the two girls who weren't her own, comparing their wildly varying looks. She could definitely understand Lara's crack about Cassie's attire; the girl's frilly black dress was at least a century removed from the more casual muggle clothes that Lily and the twins were wearing.

Lara, on the other hand, was a beguiling mix of wizard and muggle. She wore a knee-length pleated skirt that could have been from Madam Malkin's Hogwarts selection if not for the fact that it was a black and purple tartan with gold highlights. Glasses weren't unusual in the wizarding world, but the thick, purple plastic frames Lara wore were definitely of muggle manufacture, as was the rosary made of glossy black beads. Her top, on the other hand, was most decidedly magical: a three-quarters sleeve jersey shirt that was purple with gold sleeves, the colors of the Pride of Portree quidditch team. Flying back and forth across Lara's chest was golden line art of three figures on brooms and every so often, the three would slam into each other before the lines wriggled and reshaped into the words 'Chasers do it better as a group'.

Cute. If she ended up having to explain the concept of a ménage à trois to her children by the time the day was through, her son was getting a Howler...

As the children sipped their tea, Lily cast about for something to start a conversation with. But before she could, Jasmine decided to break the silence. "So... do you like quidditch?"

"Well yeah. I thought the shirt would make it obvious." Lily bit back a frown at the irritated look that flashed across Jasmine's face, but Lara's next words sealed her fate. "Always thought it'd be neat to play when I grow up, but I'm rubbish on a broom so I doubt I'll even make my house team."

Finishing her tea in one long pull, Jasmine pushed back from the table. "And on that note, I'm going flying. You guys have fun doing... whatever it is girls who don't fly do for fun." She was out the back door and onto her broom before Lily could stop her, red hair fluttering behind her like a comet's tail as she rocketed towards the manor's quidditch pitch.

The three remaining girls looked at each other as awkward silence descended, and then Rose rolled her eyes. "Don't mind my sister, Lara. She's been a bit obsessed with quidditch ever since... well, she's a bit obsessed right now. I'm sure we can find something fun to do. Wanna see my room?"

"Sure. C'mon, Sindy." Grabbing the surprised Cassie by the wrist, Lara rose from her seat and tugged the veela behind her as Rose led her towards the stairs. "Wow. No electricity here? I thought Ma said your mother was a muggleborn?"

Lily watched the trio disappear from view before letting out a sigh of relief, sinking into one of the empty chairs and using her wand to send the abandoned cups floating towards the sink. "...well, not sure how I feel about Jasmine's new attitude but overall it could have been a lot worse."

Canceling the Disillusionment Charm she'd been hiding under, Narcissa rose from her spot on the sofa and made her way over to join Lily, tugging the redhead's chair back a bit before settling on her lap. "Mmm. Hope that Lara girl doesn't traumatize poor Cassie. At

least when it comes to upbringing, your girls are more wizarding than muggle. I doubt Cassie's ever met someone quite like Lara."

"Hey now. My girls aren't your average witches." Narcissa raised one fine black brow at that and Lily smirked. "My girls not only know what electricity is, they can pronounce it properly."

Leaning in, Narcissa wrapped her arms around Lily's neck, fingers combing through her long red hair. "Is that some sort of crack against my daughter, darling?"

Lily permitted herself a moment of indulgence, enjoying the vast amount of cleavage that Narcissa's low-cut neckline put on display, before sliding her eyes up to meet her lover's. "Well, either her or her mother. Miss Eckeltricity." Narcissa let out an indignant huff at that and Lily chuckled, leaning up to kiss her gently on the lips. "You know, you're lucky you're cute because you'd starve in the wild..."

"...Ma's a witch who's working on a new book that she's hoping the Muggle Studies professor at Hogwarts will use when she finishes, and my Pa's a muggle who works at BBC Scotland writing for An Là's sports bits. So they're both writers, just with really different ideas of what's interesting. He wasn't keen on me skipping a day of school to come over, but Ma convinced him it didn't really matter. After all, I'm not going to go any further than primary in the muggle system so my grades don't really matter."

Rose gave a little shudder at the mention of going to school. She thanked God every day that her mother was smart enough to be a good teacher in addition to everything else she did to keep the house running smoothly. While she didn't see herself as above the muggle kids of the neighborhood or too good to attend school with them, she just didn't see the point. Apart from reading, writing, and basic math skills - all things she could and had learned at home - not much of what she would have wasted seven hours a day getting pounded into her head by muggle teachers would have been useful come her eleventh birthday. "Well, she's right to be honest. I've never gone to school a day in my life and I haven't missed anything that would help me at Hogwarts. And just think. In a few more months, you're going to have to say goodbye to all your friends and start all over. If they'd kept you out of school like me and Cassie, you wouldn't have that problem."

After blinking slowly a few times, Lara frowned. "Huh. You're right. I hadn't even thought of that. Well that's a bloody fucking depressing thought. Let's talk about something happier." Turning to Cassie, she snapped her fingers. "Black. Is your dad Sirius Black? The Wizengamot guy?" Cassie nodded and Lara perked up. "Really? Mam reads me the government section of the Prophet whenever they meet. He's bloody hilarious. And if he's married to a veela, that makes you one too, right? Or part one?"

Cassie let out a little huff at that. "I'm a veela. There's actually no such thing as a 'half' veela or 'quarter' veela, no matter what Lockhart tries to tell people in Vacationing With Veela."

"Ah. So, how long until this allure thing of yours is supposed to kick in? Because we've been sitting here talking for at least half an hour, and I still don't think you're pretty." Lara paused and pondered her words for a moment before offering a revised version. "I mean, you're pretty and all in an 'ooh, isn't that lamp pretty' way but not in the 'trip over myself and do stupid things to impress you' way people normally talk about veela."

That made Rose chuckle as she looked up from the bottle of blood red muggle nail polish Lara had brought with her. She had to admit, the stuff smelled truly foul and took time to dry but really, how easy could it be to point a wand accurately at one's own fingertips? Especially when it came time to color the nails on her dominant hand? And besides, going through all the different colors Lara owned to help each other pick out the perfect color had been fun. "Lara, you do realize you're a girl, right? And that Cassie's a girl?" Lara nodded. "The whole veela allure thing has to do with mating, so why would you be affected?" She opted not to give voice to her own ponderings as to whether or not Jasmine might be affected when the time came... or herself. "And besides, she's too young. It probably won't even show up until next summer or so."

Lara scowled and crossed her arms over her chest defensively. "Well I didn't know that, did I? It's not like there are a lot of veela running around muggle Glasgow for me to meet. I just know bits and pieces from when they get mentioned in the Prophet or Quibbler: they're really pretty, they have this power that makes people stupid around them, and... well, all kinds of rumors about things like being able to control storms and turn into animals without actually being animagi but..." She trailed off as Cassie curled her fingers into a fist

before slowly opening them, tendrils of lightning jumping between her fingers. "Wicked!"

"Thanks. But no, Rose is right. Even if I was old enough to have my allure already, you probably wouldn't be affected by it. Well, unless you're like Jasmine." Cassie squeaked, bringing her hands up to cover her mouth as her blue-grey eyes went wide. "Oh poop. I'm pretty sure I wasn't supposed to say anything about that..."

Reaching out, Rose patted her cousin on the shoulder. "Well until she admits it, it's not like there's an actual secret that you're letting slip, right? So don't worry. Besides, Lara would have found out sooner or later. Lately, Jasmine's been about as subtle as Dad's coworkers when they try to dress up like muggles." Turning to the curious Lara, Rose elaborated. "My sister likes girls. Or rather, she's being stupidly obvious about liking a particular girl. Some wizards and witches are against that sort of thing, but it doesn't really matter to me. It's just annoying to watch someone..." She paused to glance at Cassie before returning her attention to Lara. "...insist on being very obvious about a crush when the other person doesn't seem to care about them. She's just going to end up embarrassing herself and considering we're twins... yeah, I'm not exactly looking forward to that. And Cassie, if girls who like girls can be affected by your allure? No offense, but I hope your dad does decide to send you to Beauxbatons. I mean, if this is how bad Jasmine is over a normal girl..."

The bottle of black nail polish she'd been examining slipped between Cassie's suddenly slack fingers and dropped to the floor; Rose cringed as she waited for mess to ensue but evidently it was tougher than it looked because it survived the impact without a single crack. "What's this about Beauxbatons?"

"Oh. I heard Mum and Aunt Narcissa talking about it with Uncle Sirius. I thought your parents would have mentioned it to you by now. Something about there being other veela going to school at Beauxbatons right now, so you wouldn't be the only one." Cassie shook her head slowly and Rose winced. "Oops? Erm... surprise?"

"Well, as long as your sister doesn't decide to crush on me, I don't have a problem with it. I'm fine with gays as long as nobody tries to be gay with me." Opening a bottle of polish the same purple as her glasses and shirt, Lara went to work on her nails. Sitting in front of

her was a bottle of gold nail polish and when Lara went straight from her thumb to her middle finger, leaving the nail on her index finger unpainted, Rose realized her intention. Wow. Someone was taking her Pride of Portree obsession a little bit too far. After all, she and Jasmine supported the Holyhead Harpies but they didn't walk around with green everything. "So, who's the girl that your sister likes? How do you know that she - uh, the other girl she - doesn't like your sister back?"

Rose crawled over to her nightstand and opened the envelope containing all the pictures that Harry had sent home in his letters. Their mother had offered to make copies for both her and Jasmine but while Rose was interested in all aspects of her future school, Jasmine had passed up all pictures not featuring a certain brunette. Although given how much time Hermione and Harry spent together, that was a minority of pictures. Finding a nice picture of her brother and his friend, she put it on her bed and then dug out a few more pictures before tucking the envelope back into the drawer and returning to Lara and Cassie with her booty. Holding up the first wizarding photograph for Lara to see, she peered around the edge to make sure that both of its occupants were still visible, the blonde leaning in to get a better look. "The girl with brown hair punching the boy is Hermione. The boy is my brother Harry. Jasmine has a crush on Hermione and since when Hermione was here for Christmas she spent some time flying with Jasmine, Jasmine is now convinced Hermione likes her back. Which she shouldn't be; I mean, Hermione spent a lot of time with me, too, talking to me about Hogwarts and what we'll be doing at school next year. So either she was just being nice or... I don't know, she likes both of us?" One option was bad, the other creepy, and either should have convinced Jasmine to knock it off. Rose tilted her head to one side as something occurred to her. "Come to think of it, though, I'm not even sure Hermione likes other girls. Which means Jasmine might be making herself look really stupid instead of just kinda stupid, which then makes me look bad because again, twins. Plus, even if Hermione does like girls and my sister in particular? Hermione and Harry are either best friends or really close. There's no way Jasmine and Hermione being together could end well for anyone around them. I mean, if she and Hermione did date and then break up, who's Harry supposed to side with? Or even when they just argue? It's a bad idea all around, it is."

Nodding, Lara leaned back as she returned to working on her nails. "Well, I don't know what she sees in the violent fuzzball, but your

brother's kind of cute. And right handy with a wand, according to that story in the Daily Prophet. Just out of curiosity... as long as we don't end up being best friends, it wouldn't be weird for me to try and date him, right?"

"No. As long as you don't mind being part of a harem." Laying the rest of the pictures out on the floor in a row, Rose went down the line, doing her best to keep the names of the girls who orbited around her brother straight. "The tiny girl wearing the tuque with cat ears is Daphne Greengrass, the heiress of the Greengrass family. Her family's actually trying to set up a marriage contract between her and Harry. The girl with the reddish-brown hair who looks a lot older but is actually her half-sister and the exact same age is Tracey... she actually slept in Harry's room when his friends stayed over one night. Then there's..." Rose frowned as she stared down at the picture of an Asian girl with creepy purple eyes. She'd still yet to figure out this particular mystery and she hated things she couldn't figure out. "Harry calls her Li Su when he uses her whole name but then she's just Su most of the time, so I don't know what's going on there. And on top of that? Our other cousin Tara who's at Hogwarts right now seems to like him, and he and Hermione are really close, too, so Jasmine might be crushing on someone who has a crush on her own brother. Then there's... I don't have a picture of her, but there's this weird girl named Luna who Harry took to a party at Greengrass Manor. And Cassie has a crush on him too."

Lara let out a low whistle. "Wow. Sounds like quite a crowd. Then again, it's not like I could actually date your brother; my parents would probably kick me out if I came home dating a Sassenach. On the other hand, you lot have a huge fucking house and if we were dating, your parents might let your brother's poor homeless girlfriend move in..."

"Or you could just try and meet a nice Scottish boy when you get to Hogwarts."

"Or that."

Days passed, then weeks, and then months. Winter turned into spring and the blanket of snow that suffocated the grounds of Hogwarts melted away to refill the lake, the water being soaked up by the blossoming plants as the song of the green once again echoed across the land. Classes proceeded exactly as Harry

remembered them, the only real difference in his life being that his quidditch practices focused on drilling new chaser tactics into Hermione and the Flying Foxes, as he'd jokingly started calling them, rather than practicing moves for his own position.

With the team captain grounded for the upcoming match in order to put Hermione into the lineup, Harry had taken up the role mostly because... well, he was the only one who wanted the job, it turned out. For all the older members' complaining during the first match, nobody wanted to be in charge because that meant being the one who got blamed if something went wrong. Not that Harry particularly minded; he'd been the captain before and so it wasn't like he was stumbling around in unfamiliar territory. Besides, it saved him from having to instruct someone else in the Care and Feeding of Muggleborn Keepers.

A quill scratched faintly against parchment, forming increasingly familiar runes as he watched, and Harry amended that. There were two real differences between his past life and this one: the differences at quidditch practice and the fact that he was now learning Ancient Runes, albeit unofficially. It was the second part of his two-stage plan with Cherise: first he'd sent her a book on the subject for Christmas - one of her favorite non-clothing presents, according to the blonde - and then gone back to her to ask if her offer to tutor him was still open. After all, he'd reasoned with her, the OWLs would cover her first three years of the elective and so going back to revisit the basics with him could only help her chances. She'd agreed and so their twice-weekly study sessions had begun.

Harry grinned as he leaned in a bit closer, ostensibly to get a better look at the Elder Futhark runes emerging from the end of Cherise's quill. While he genuinely did have an interest in the subject, learning from the blonde came with benefits that traditional classroom instruction did not. Large, soft, rounded benefits that Harry could stare at to his heart's content thanks to Cherise's habit of doffing her house tie and vest as soon as classes let out each day, even going so far as to release the top two or three buttons of her blouse as she let her metaphorical - and sometimes literal - hair down. Since he was only eleven as far as she knew and 'too young' for that sort of thing, it probably never even dawned on her how much he would be enjoying the view she provided him.

At least in Cherise's presence, he could admire a girl and not feel guilty about it, and so Harry took advantage of it as often as possible. Fifteen to his mental eighteen was on the lower end of the acceptable range as far as he was concerned, but it was a very welcome change from the eleven and twelve-year-olds who were currently expressing their interest in him in one way or another. Eyes raking eagerly over the pale flesh of his tutor's chests, Harry paused and contemplated a series of slightly darker brown freckles on the upper slope of her left breast before tilting his head a hair to the right. From this angle, it almost looked like the Plough...

"Now remember, you have to think from right to left when you're working with Elder Futhark. And for each rune, the professor will expect you to memorize its proto-Germanic name, how we transliterate it into English, what the rune meant to the people who used it originally, and what it means to our kind." Cherise tapped a rune that for all intents and purposes was a capital 'M'. "Take ehwa here. It originally meant 'horse', but we use it as 'partnership'. Maybe because we see some sort of partnership when a horse lets a man ride him?" She shrugged. "Thankfully you don't need to try and make sense out of that part of things, or I probably would be getting straight Trolls in the class."

There was a chuckle followed by the faint groan of wood as someone joined them. "Not that skating the border between Poor and Acceptable is anything for a prefect to brag about, Reese. Oh well. At least graduating means I won't be here to see you be the first prefect since '86 to get their badge taken away over OWL scores."

Harry looked up, intending to try and sniff out whether or not Remus was the prefect in question and what exactly had happened, only to have his brain lock up. The newcomer wasn't sitting on the other side of Cherise on the bench but rather perched on the table. And that meant that directly at eye level was a rather respectably sized pair of... "Tits."

"I have them, yes." Guiltily jerking his gaze upward, Harry gave a start as he realized why the voice sounded familiar. Their visitor was Rachel Corwin, the current Head Girl. He'd seen her around the common room a few times since January 5th but hadn't actually gotten close enough to get a proper look at her. Now that he was

looking, however, it only reinforced his initial reaction of... how the hell had he missed a girl like this if she existed in his universe?

Even ignoring her pale skin, red hair, and green eyes, Harry wasn't at all ashamed to admit that he generally preferred girls with more voluptuous figures and this year's Head Girl most definitely had one. While he was far from an expert when it came to the female form, what with his sexual experience being limited to the rather lithe Luna and one time with his universe's Daphne, he was pretty damn sure that Rachel qualified as 'voluptuous'. She wasn't quite up there with the joke-cracking Tracey of his oneiromantic dreams or Narcissa Malfoy, but she wasn't too far removed from either. He had to give her extra points for presentation, too: like Cherise, she'd doffed her vest and red and gold tie after getting out of class for the afternoon, but Rachel had gone so far as to transfigure her white button front shirt into a more casual white peasant blouse. And he remembered from his first meeting with her that she had a nice pair of hips. Couldn't judge her bum, since she was sitting on that. Altogether, though...

Rachel coughed faintly, drawing Harry's eyes back up to her amused face. "Ahem. If you're done eyeing me like a particularly tasty piece of meat?" Harry blushed as he nodded, glancing over at Cherise to find his tutor with a mixed expression of amusement and annoyance gracing her face. "Since you probably want to slink off in shame right about now, why don't I give you the easy out? I need to chat with Reese here for a few minutes. Why don't you go find something to do that doesn't involve... well, being here?"

Suddenly, the doors swung open with a bang and the volume in the Great Hall jumped from whispers of studying group to a louder rumble of outright conversation. Leaning backwards to peer around Cherise, Harry raised an eyebrow as he watched a somewhat familiar girl in the yellow and black trimmed uniform of a Hufflepuff stomp through the hall, muttering under her breath. But it wasn't until Cherise let out a hiss and whispered a name that Harry recognized her properly. And since Rachel and Cherise evidently needed him to disappear for a few minutes... "...good idea. I think I'll go see what Janae did to herself. Be right back."

The more Harry thought about it, the less surprising it was to him that he hadn't been able to tell it was Janae. While her hair hadn't been as long as Daphne or Tara's when last they'd met, it certainly had

been longer than the short blonde fuzz that still graced her head. What the hell had happened to the poor girl? That wasn't the haircut of a girl in the mood to try something new, that was... that was the hairstyle of someone dyed her hair in her sleep and she had to cut it to get the blue out. Or someone with spell damage. Or maybe something had removed a bunch of her hair for her and so the rest had to go too. Almost absently, Harry found himself thinking back to the day's events in his past life... and then it clicked. Norbert. The Norwegian Ridgeback had taken out a chunk of Hagrid's beard with a small burp of flame in his original universe. Had Janae been the one to fall victim to Hagrid's newest pet here? Or perhaps fallen victim as well?

Waiting until she threw herself down in a seat, Harry hopped the bench and settled himself down beside her. She stiffened at his presence before relaxing and pulling books out of her bag, intent on ignoring him just like all the others staring at her at the moment. Harry wasn't going to let her, though. "Interesting new look, Janae."

"Thank you. I like it." Janae pulled out a pot of ink and a quill, unrolling some parchment and cracking open one of her books. "Now, are you over here bothering me for a reason or can I get to work on my homework?"

Chuckling, Harry stood back up, hopping up onto the bench he'd been sitting on before dropping back down to the floor on the other side. "If that's what you really want. Oh, and Janae?" The Hufflepuff let a vaguely inquisitive noise, her quill halfway to the parchment, waiting for his words. "You might want to remind Hagrid that dragons and wooden huts are two things that aren't supposed to mix."

Janae dropped her quill as she turned to look back over her shoulder at him. "How..?"

"Gryffindor Tower has one heck of a view. And you need to learn not to wander the corridors cursing under your breath. The walls have ears around here. Some of them are right chatty, too." Harry found himself hoping that she actually did have said bad habit, or he'd be stuck digging both for a new excuse and an explanation as to why he'd just lied to her. In an effort to further distract her, Harry drew his wand and waved it in a slow arc over her head, starting near her hairline and running all the way down to the nape of her neck. "Aisig falt." Under his magic's ministrations, her follicles burst into

overdrive and in under a minute her blonde fuzz had been replaced by waist-length black hair with blonde tips. Huh. "You and your sister dye your hair? I never would have guessed, what with how light your eyebrows and stuff are."

Pulling a chunk of hair forward so she could inspect it, Janae's still-blond eyebrows shot up. "Actually, we don't. This black thing is new. Not that it's a bad thing, necessarily. I actually kind of like it." Shrugging, she released the black strands and then made a shooing motion in Harry's direction. "Whatever. Now shoo, Potter. Unless you want to do my homework for me, that is?"

Hmm. Fifth year work would be a nice change of pace from the mind-numbing boredom of firstie crap, but... "Sorry, Cram. Places to go, people to see. Maybe another time?" Janae let out a snort at that and turned back to her work, causing Harry to glance over at where Cherise was still talking to Rachel. Hmm. Well in that case... eyes wandering over to Ravenclaw table, Harry spotted Tracey and Tara hunched over a book. Drawing his wand, he gave it a swish and a flick, levitating Tara up out of her seat and moving her down just enough to create a hole for him before setting her back down. Slipping in to the newly created spot between the two girls, Harry grinned. "Good afternoon, Angels."

"Good afternoon, Harry."

One minute he was working with Cherise, or rather listening to her explain what she was doing and why as she finished up her latest Ancient Runes assignment. The next his arms were windmilling as his chair was tipped back, and then Harry found himself staring up into a pair of hazel-verging-on-blue eyes. "Miss Cram. Or should I say, other Miss Cram. Nice hair."

Janae kept one hand on the back of Harry's chair, the other reaching up to play with the ends of her hair. Since he'd last seen her, she'd not only trimmed off the blonde tips but greatly reduced its length, ending up with an asymmetrical style that was a bit past chin length on one side and a tad above on the other. "Thanks. It's actually why I'm here. That spell you cast on me... how much research did you do on it?"

"Um, none? My mother is doing some work with the MacFustys and so I owled her when I heard about Hagrid's new pet, because I figured someone would lose some hair eventually. She owled them and they sent the reply directly to me here at school with a few different spells that might come in handy." Harry frowned, furrowing his brow as he tried to think of a reason why she might have asked the question. Maybe because she hadn't found it any book in the library, and none of the staff would have heard of it either? "It's actually one they invented a few generations back that only a few people outside the family know, so if you could keep things to yourself..?"

After waving off his concerns, Janae pointed to the top of her head. "I tried a dozen charms to regrow my hair after Norbert burped it all off. Not one of them worked. Now they work again, but all the hair that comes out is black. All I want to know is whether or not you knew that was going to happen to me, or if you cast a spell on me without knowing exactly what you were doing. One answer gets you smacked. The other does not."

Harry did his best to smile innocently at her. "Just out of curiosity, which would be the smack-free answer?"

"Brat. Whatever. I don't care. I'm just glad I have hair again. So... thanks." Janae released Harry's chair, letting the front two legs drop back to the floor before leaning down and hugging him from behind. That was unexpected but not entirely unwelcome, Harry decided. Like Cherise, she was old enough that he could enjoy having her

pressed up against him. Then a pair of lips pressed against his cheek and Harry went rigid, feeling a blush spread over his cheeks. "Just don't make a habit out of casting random spells on me when you don't know what they do. You got lucky this time; I'd be a lot less amused if I was stuck with blue skin or something."

Nodding dumbly, Harry watched Janae circle around their table and head off towards the library doors. Huh. If that was the reward he was going to get for helping pretty witches in distress, maybe he'd make himself more available to the upper years in the future. It would certainly make the wait for his peers to physically mature a good deal more tolerable. After a few seconds, he forced himself back to the present and turned his attention back to his tutor and what they'd been doing before being so rudely interrupted. "Now then, where were we?"

Cherise drew her wand, waving it over her parchment and casting a spell to keep the ink from smudging before rolling it up. "I was finishing my homework while you were flirting with my evil twin. So I guess I'll see you on Thursday." Before he could respond, she stuffed her books and parchment into her bag and rose from her seat, stalking off in the same direction as Janae, her gait far more predatory than he was used to seeing.

All Harry could do was blink. Flirting? With Janae? What? He shook his head. Give him a dark lord any day. They were so much easier to understand than girls...

Fiddling with the straps on his shin guard, Harry frowned. While they were smaller and lighter than the monstrous pads Hermione wore when she played keeper, they still felt huge compared to the loaner set of thin brown pads he'd used for the Gryffindor versus Slytherin match. But if they saved him from a broken leg, he couldn't really complain. His biceps and thighs felt distressingly bared compared to his shins and forearms, but that was life. His parents had evidently run through a few variations but failed to come up with something that both had joints and was flexible enough to give a player a full range of mobility, and being able to survive bludger hits was useless if the seeker couldn't grab the snitch. Grabbing his helmet, twin to Hermione's, he tucked it under his arm as he looked around at his teammates. "Right then. I had a speech prepared here but one of Hagrid's beasties ate it, so... everyone ready?"

Angelina nodded before flipping a crisp up into the air. Her dark hair swished gently as she ducked under it, letting it fall neatly into her mouth. After chewing and swallowing, the leader of the Flying Foxes smiled at Harry. "I am. With you and Hermione out there, the three of us barely have to do anything."

"Funny, Angelina." Harry stuck his tongue out at the dark-skinned witch; the three chasers had relaxed and opened up to him a bit more over the past few months. On the other hand, the Weasley twins were still oddly distant but it didn't bother Harry too much. After all, he wasn't friends with Ron - or rather Anne - here and so what reason did they have to make nice with a lowly firstie? And it wasn't like he'd actually made an effort to befriend them himself, as busy as he was with the Angels and other projects. So really, was it that hard to believe? Shaking his head, Harry turned his attention back to Angelina... and a little bet he'd made with the chasers. "Just remember, it's you three versus me. First to one-fifty wins. So unless you're that eager to get a makeover, I'd fly hard."

Stealing one last crisp from the bag in Angelina's hands, Katie chuckled. "Please. We're so going to whoop you. By this time Monday, you're going to be begging for a boy's uniform back." Biting her crisp in half, she looked over at their temporary starting keeper. "You ready, Hermione? Last chance to change your mind and give Oliver his position back."

Hermione snorted, rising from her seat and snatching the half-eaten bag of Walkers crisps away from the chasers. "This'll teach me to hide my goodies down here to keep Megan out of them." After shoving her decimated bag of crisps into Oliver's hands, Hermione hefted her own helmet and pulled it on. "Gryffindors go forward, Katie. So let's get out there before Hooch decides we're taking too long and makes us forfeit the match. That'd be an embarrassing end to the DMGS's visit, huh?"

Suitably chastised, the chasers made one last check of their equipment before rising and heading for the changing room's exit, the Weasley twins right behind them with a broom on one shoulder and a beater's bat on the other. After giving one last look around the room, Harry yanked his helmet on and followed Hermione out into the bright sunlight, Lee Jordan's voice echoing over the pitch as he announced the team. "...chasers Katie Bell, Angelina Johnson, and Alicia Spinnet. Playing beater are Fred and George Weasley... and

don't ask me which is which, because even I don't know. At seeker is Hogwarts' own new wonder boy, Harry Potter. And starting at keeper and making the team captain himself ride the bench today... Hermione Granger!"

"You know, I like the sound of that. Starting keeper." Hermione shot a look back over her shoulder and Harry followed her line of sight, watching as Wood slunk out of the changing room behind them as he juggled both his broom and a mass of parchments. "You're a lot easier to deal with than Wood, too. And the chasers like you. Maybe we can mount a coup? You can be the youngest quidditch captain in however long and I can be the youngest keeper in... I don't know the record for that one, either, come to think of it."

Harry took a moment to seriously ponder the idea. It would give him more free time, ironically; despite the additional responsibilities that came with being captain, it'd still be a lighter workload than playing under Wood. Then again, as Hermione had pointed out, it would make him stand out even more than being the youngest seeker in a century already did. He was already doing a good job at standing out; did he want people paying even more attention to him than they already were? Finally, he reached a decision. "I'll do it... but only if you can tell me what the phrase 'coup d'état' actually means. Considering we're leading one, we should probably know."

"It's French."

"For?"

"...can I get back to you on that?" Harry chuckled as they joined the other twelve players, lining up in the third row with the chasers in front and the Weasley twins in the middle. Madam Hooch offered her standard warning about a clean game as both teams mounted their brooms, which made Harry and Hermione snort in perfect sync; the teams that played clean didn't need the reminder and endless repetitions of the speech had evidently failed to impress the concept upon the Slytherin players. The chasers began to tighten up around Hooch, jostling for position as the white-haired referee hefted the quaffle in one hand. Then the whistle shrilled sharply as she tossed the ball into the air, Angelina darting in to slap at the quaffle and sending it spiraling towards Katie.

The ball touched Katie's hand.

Katie pulled the ball in, tucking it against her body as she took off. Cutting off Alicia with a move so close that the dark-skinned girl nearly got a face full of bristles, Katie rolled and rocketed between two Hufflepuff chasers as she gained altitude, heading down the pitch at top speed. "...and the Gryffindors are off to a good start, showing it's not just Potter and Granger that help them win games. Bell slips between Macavoy and Applebee, making a beeline for Fleet and the Hufflepuff rings." Harry grinned as he watched Katie close in on the poor petrified Hufflepuff keeper, weaving back and forth as she closed in on her target. "She jukes left... right... left... she throws... score!"

Chuckling as he watched the Hufflepuffs try to collect their dignity and the quaffle, Harry floated lazily past one of the Gryffindor stands and high fived Katie as she passed. Looking down at his peers, an inane thought popped into Harry's mind: they needed a mascot. If the Irish national team could have leprechauns and the Bulgarians could have veela, why couldn't Gryffindor have something to inspire the crowd? A griffin... would probably end up mauling some Slytherin with a rich father and being put down by McNair in short order. Same with a lion. Hmm. Harry eyed a clump of older girls with red and gold paint splashed on their faces, cheering and waving red and gold pom-poms. Well, they weren't quite veela but...

A figure in yellow and black rocketed past, her blonde hair slapping noisily against the side of Harry's helmet, and he wheeled around to watch her go. While they couldn't cast any spells during the game, there was nothing that prohibited them from charming their helmets ahead of time so they could communicate easily during the game. And as much fun as straining his voice to scream up and down the pitch was... "Hey Hermione... up for a round of Pop Goes the Weasel?"

Hermione nodded as she began to drift forward, her voice sounding clearly in his ears as the charms on his helmet made it sound like they were sitting together in the common room study instead of halfway across the pitch from each other. "Dibs on the punching. You know I've got the better right jab." That she did, Harry had to admit. He'd felt it enough times, after all.

Leaning forward, Harry took off in pursuit of Macavoy as Hermione began to pick up speed, racing head-on at the Hufflepuff chaser.

The blonde waggled to the left and then the right, trying to shake Hermione's kamikaze run, but each time the Gryffindor keeper corrected her own course. "I don't know what Granger and Potter are up to but if they fail, the rings are completely unprotected and it's an easy ten points for... oh!" At the last second, Hermione shot past Macavoy on the Hufflepuff's right, just as Harry slid to the left and made to pass her. Her arm shot out, punching the ball out of the chaser's possession and sending it right into Harry's waiting hands. "Holy hell, I've seen the chasers do something like that, but never the keeper and the seeker! What in the world will that pair come up with next?"

There was a whistle as the Hufflepuffs descended on Madame Hooch, protesting the move, but since Hermione hadn't actually hit Macavoy and it was hard to prove intent, there was no blatching call and the game quickly resumed. Harry whipped the ball up the pitch to Alicia, who waited for the other two chasers to form up before starting her own run on the goals.

After her little show, the Hufflepuffs evidently thought Hermione was a greater threat than Wood and she quickly found both bludgers batted her way in rapid succession. One bounced off her left shin as she rolled her broom to bring the fat pad into position, the other deflected as she batted it away with her right blocker. Both beaters received obscene gestures and Harry was momentarily worried Hermione would abandon the scoring area to chase them down and deliver payback, but she kept her head in the game and settled for glaring at them from her perch in front of the rings.

Leaving the other players to their own devices for a bit, Harry pulled his attention away from the battle over the quaffle and began making slow circuits of the pitch as he looked for the snitch, varying his height each lap to get the best possible view. Every fifth lap took him high enough to see into the professors' box, but it wasn't until his twentieth lap of the pitch that he finally took the time to see who'd come out to watch the game that day. His mother and - surprisingly enough - father were both there and decked out in red and gold, as were his younger sisters. Sitting between the four Potters and Sirius, Anastasiya, and Cassie, though, were two women who shared the same color of hair as his mother and sisters. It took Harry a moment to figure out who the strangely familiar pair were: Narcissa in disguise and a face he'd previously only seen in his dreams... his father's future girlfriend Sheena. Although if she was already here,

what did that mean? Harry had a feeling that he'd be privy to some very interesting conversations when he returned home for the summer. Then he noticed a very unexpected - but welcome - someone, pulling up on the handle of his broom and coming to an abrupt stop in front of her. "Luna?"

"Hullo, Harry Potter." Wide silver eyes stared up at him from underneath a very familiar lion hat as Luna grinned and waved. "Lovely weather for a game, isn't it? Pity the Hufflepuffs seem to be suffering from Loser's Lurgy today. It would be more interesting if they could actually put up a fight."

Professor Sprout puffed up in indignation even as a few others snickered, but the professor's attempt at a response was cut off as the mouth on Luna's lion hat opening and releasing a very realistic roar. Action on the pitch came to a complete stop as the sound rolled across the grounds and both players and spectators alike turned to stare at a beaming Luna. Harry just shook his head; some things never changed. Giving her a wave, he turned and dove away, returning to the hunt for the snitch.

After a second, the others followed his lead and commentary resumed as well. "With the way the Gryffindors are starting to pull away, I have to agree. Heh. Loser's Lurgy. You're a funny girl. Can't wait for you to come to Hogwarts."

"Jordan!"

"What? It is. And it's sixty to thirty... err, make that seventy to thirty as Johnson puts another one through the rings. I hear the chasers and Harry Potter have a bet going... whoever scores more points before the end of the game wins. Potter, might want to find that snitch soon. I hear there's a girls' uniform in your future if they win and trust me, you don't have the legs for it."

Harry snorted; he'd be a bit worried if he did have the legs to pull the look off, honestly. But Jordan did have a good point and so he sped up his laps around the pitch, eyes flicking back and forth quickly as he sought any glimpse of gold that could prove to be the snitch. Two laps later, the snitch remained stubbornly absent and so Harry activated the charm that linked his helmet to Hermione's. "This is your captain speaking... we have achieved cruising altitude and you are now free to move about the pitch."

Or at least Hermione would be once the proper circumstances arose. And as Harry watched, one of the Hufflepuff chasers managed to dip between Katie and Alicia and intercept a pass, racing off towards Hermione and the rings. Unlike before, though, Hermione began her way forward before accelerating and leaving the scoring area entirely as she moved to intercept the girl. The pair juked back and forth several times in sync before the Hufflepuff gave up on trying to dodge around Hermione and raised her arm to make the shot. That proved to be a critical error as Hermione reached out and swatted the ball away, diving after it to touch off the debut of their newest tactic.

"...and Granger strips Macavoy of the quaffle, diving to retrieve it and... where's she going? Oye, Granger! Your rings are in the other direction!" That provoked laughter from all corners of the pitch, laughter that quickly abated when Hermione showed no sign of turning back. Weaving in and out of the confused Hufflepuff players, she flew all the way down to the opposite set of rings, offering the Hufflepuff keeper a friendly wave with her off hand before winding up and hurling the quaffle through the right ring. "Erm... Granger scores? Eighty to thirty? Madam Hooch... Mister Bagman... can we get some confirmation there?"

Hooch's whistle had both teams gathering in the middle of the field, with Bagman joining them a few seconds later after launching himself from the staff box on a broom of his own. He came to a stop slightly behind Hooch, waiting to see how the local authority handled the situation before stepping in himself. Hooch simply turned to Harry and raised an eyebrow, not even giving the Hufflepuffs a chance to voice what would have been a very obvious complaint. "Well, Potter?"

"Simple. The keeper can't leave the scoring area except to intercept an incoming chaser, right? Except... there's no rule limiting how long they're allowed to stay out, is there?" Hooch, who had opened her mouth to reply to Harry's initial - and rhetorical - question, closed her mouth with an audible click. "So the way we see it, until Hermione crosses the line and enters the scoring area around our rings again, she's free as a bird. Unless we have an old copy of the rulebook and they've added a rule against roaming keepers recently, that is. Mister Bagman?"

After a few moments of silence, Hooch cleared her throat and Bagman jerked before looking around. "Sorry, sorry, just reviewing the most recent batch of rule changes to go into effect. We forward them to the teams so they know before the referee calls them on a new foul, but only update the books sold in stores once a year. Although even if there was a new rule against it - which there isn't - I don't think it would apply here because Madam Hooch holds you all to the last printed rulebook, not the last rules addendum. Goal is good. Eighty to thirty Gryffindor."

Hooch nodded and tapped her wand against her throat, magnifying her voice. "After conferring with Mister Bagman, the goal stands. Eighty to thirty Gryffindor, Hufflepuff in possession." The Gryffindors in the stands began cheering at the announcement, Harry and his teammates leaving the Hufflepuffs behind to complain as they returned to the air. Eventually, though, the badgers gave up and the game resumed as Fleet drifted back down the field to retrieve his quaffle. He gave it a half-hearted toss up the field, a mistake that proved costly when Angelina dove in front of Preece and stole the pass, entering the scoring area a few seconds later and picking up the team's ninth goal on a curving shot that slammed into the rim of the left ring before ricocheting in.

"And Johnson doesn't waste any time, capitalizing on a mistake by the rattled Hufflepuff keeper to drive the score up to ninety to thirty. If I were a certain seeker, I'd be getting nervous right about now." Harry rolled his eyes; if things got up to a hundred and thirty and there was no sign of the snitch, maybe then he'd start sweating. For now, though, he had a team to lead. Catching Hermione's eye, Harry reached down and slapped his thigh twice, the muggleborn nodding sharply in response before wheeling around and heading for the staff box. "In another curious move, here comes Granger and... I think something's wrong with her pads? She's tugging at the straps, but... wait, I think she's loosening them. What in the world?"

"Honestly, Lee, what do you think I'm doing? Chasers need to be a lot faster and more maneuverable than keepers. How am I supposed to play while wearing all this?"

"...alright then, straight from the source, we now know that the Gryffindors evidently aren't planning to send their keeper back to the rings anytime soon. Have to wonder how the chasers and Wood feel about what Granger is doing but as long as we win, I suppose I can't

complain." Harry chuckled before returning his attention to the game itself, watching a Hufflepuff chaser slip through the Flying Foxes before being intercepted by the Weasley twins. He winced as he watched Applebee get a shot off before being nailed in the side with a bludger, the quaffle bouncing off the side of the center ring and then hitting the right ring before falling earthward. Katie dove down to retrieve the ball, making a slow loop around the posts before hurling the ball up the pitch to where the newly unencumbered Hermione was waiting. As soon as the ball hit her hands, Hermione was off like a shot. Two evaded bludgers and a shot later, Harry realized that he should probably get to hunting for the snitch. The way Hufflepuff was playing, it might not take long for Gryffindor's three chasers - and one pseudo-chaser - to rack up five more goals.

Some might call it arrogant of him, but Harry didn't even factor Cedric into his calculations.

Once he began putting serious effort into it, it didn't take Harry long to locate his quarry. Keeping half an eye on it, Harry watched and waited until Cedric was as far away from the snitch as possible before wheeling around and flattening himself against his broom. Almost as if it knew it had been spotted, the snitch made a few uncertain moves before taking off straight up into the air. Tracking it, Harry waited until he was almost directly beneath it before yanking his broom handle up and shooting skyward in pursuit. Down below, he could see Diggory climbing in vain, hoping to catch up on an inferior broom but slowly falling back as Harry closed in on the snitch.

When it came, the game's conclusion was fairly anticlimactic. The snitch rather abruptly decided it was bored with the entire 'quidditch game' situation it found itself in and surrendered, slowing its manic flight and almost falling into Harry's outstretched hand. Rolling, Harry tipped his broom backwards and fell back towards the pitch, one arm thrust out with his fist curled around the snitch to ensure Hooch knew the game was over. With his luck, the girls would score their fifteenth goal before it was announced that he'd nabbed the snitch and then it'd be skirts for him.

"...here comes Granger, tucked in tightly between the three chasers as they advance up the field. The girls are moving like a well-oiled machine and it's definitely starting to look like this is more than just the lions taking advantage of a loophole in the rules; they definitely came into today's game planning to work as a four girl group. And

they've done a heck of a job, running the score up to one hundred and forty to sixty; Potter, I hope you're..." Rolling his eyes - and his broom - Harry pulled out of his barely controlled fall before resuming his arm waving, hoping to catch someone's attention. "Hang on, I think Potter's got the snitch. We saw him shoot up there after something, but with all the action going on down here where us mere mortals are located, I know I didn't get to see the actual catch..." Hooch's whistle again sounded as she flew over to meet him, the rest of the game coming to a halt as the others awaited word. When she reached him, Harry held out his hand and briefly opened it to display the snitch before making a fist again, not wanting it to escape. That was enough proof for Hooch, though, who grabbed his wrist and pulled his arm up into the air. "There you have it; Potter's caught the snitch! Gryffindor wins, two hundred and ninety to sixty, as Potter nabs the snitch for a hundred and fifty points and victory over the Gryffindor chasers in their side bet. Hopefully he's nicer to you than you would have been to him, ladies. And that's all for today. I'm Lee Jordan and I'll see you all back here on June 6th for Gryffindor versus Ravenclaw."

"Harry, m'boy! Impressive game." Ludo Bagman shook Harry's hand enthusiastically before turning to Hermione and doing the same. "Always exciting to see a team putting a new spin on our old game, even if things weren't as vicious as we heard they'd be from people who saw you play against the Slytherin team. And it was interesting to see that fascinating equipment of yours, both at work and up close. Muggle sports gear, your mother said?"

Harry nodded and pulled his helmet out of his bag, passing it to Bagman for inspection. "Yes, sir. Hermione brought the idea over from a game called 'field hockey' that she played before Hogwarts, although her equipment is mostly from the version they play on ice. Except for my helmet, mine was made completely from scratch using the lessons they learned from working on Hermione's. As for not hitting them hard enough, it's hard to play a rough game when you fly against Hufflepuff or Ravenclaw. They play too fair. With the Slytherins, though... well, even after the game ended, they tried to put Hermione in the hospital wing just to prove a point. We don't really feel bad about knocking them around. If you want, though, we could send you a copy of our memories to view in a pensieve?"

After exchanging looks with the half-dozen men he'd come to Hogwarts with and receiving nods all around, Bagman nodded at

Harry and passed the red and gold helmet back, the Gryffindor stuffing it back into his duffle bag for the hike up to the castle. "Very good. Well, I remember how we liked to party after games back when I played for the Wasps. I'll leave you kids to it."

"Awful nice of him, considering everyone else snuck out the other way so they could avoid him and get up to the tower quicker to start partying." Hermione glared at Bagman's retreating back as she swung her bulging bag of gear up over one shoulder. "C'mon. I'm so hungry I could eat a hippogriff."

"Think the hippogriff would have a problem with that idea." Harry dodged Hermione's fist as they left the changing room behind, looking back and noticing the pitch was almost totally abandoned. He'd spoken with both his family and the Blacks - and whatever the hell Sheena counted as - right after the game, so Harry hadn't expected them to stick around while he showered, changed, and dealt with the DMGS delegation. Still, it was a bit surprising that the Angels hadn't stayed behind, considering Hermione was one of their own and Harry was the one they were supposed to be following and protecting from his own stupidity. Oh well. He was pretty sure he could manage the walk from the pitch to the common room on his own.

Crossing the grounds, Harry and Hermione made their way back into the school and slowly ascended the seven flights of stairs up to Gryffindor Tower. The Fat Lady, already half-drunk from her celebration with Violet and a number of other women from nearby pictures, hiccupped and swung open at the sight of them. Beyond, Harry could hear a party in full swing and he steeled himself as he bent down and passed through the portrait hole.

Harry's eyes took a moment to adjust to the light of the common room. The room's windows were small and recessed, not providing sufficient light for the room even on the brightest of days and the students had neglected to light all the candles and torches for the afternoon, leaving the room steeped in shadows for their celebration. Not that he was going to say anything about it; he and Luna had taken advantage of shadowy corners after a game or two...

Trying to get his focus off of his ex-fiancé before he wandered too far down a road he didn't wish to travel, Harry looked around the room until his eyes landed on a head of pale blonde hair and his

brow furrowed as his thoughts were dragged straight back to said road. "Luna?"

"Hullo, Harry. I like your common room. Bit surprised Daphne hasn't tried to redecorate it yet, though. Isn't this too much of one color for her?" Harry gaped as he thought back to New Years Eve and Daphne's little cracks at Luna and Tara for their near matching, all-green outfits; had the blonde just made a joke or was Luna Lovegood of all people being catty? Daphne seemed to think it was the latter, glaring at the younger girl from across the sofa. Luna ignored it, patting a spot on the sofa between herself and Daphne. "Come. Sit, sit. That was a marvelously exciting game today."

Harry cautiously took a seat between Daphne and Luna. It was for the greater good, he figured: at least with him as a buffer zone, there was a lesser chance of the two of them fighting. Su was perched on the arm of a nearby chair, leaving the seat itself for Hermione, and Tara and Tracey were sharing a nearby two-seater. Looking over at Luna, he realized she was wearing something utterly familiar and yet... not. "Luna? Where did you get your hands on a Hogwarts uniform?"

Giggling, Luna reached down and tugged on the bottom of her black vest. "Same place as everyone else, Harry. Madam Malkin's." The others had a laugh at his expense as Harry rolled his eyes and leaned back. Yeah, he'd walked into that one pretty well. Given she was a pureblood and practically guaranteed to be coming to Hogwarts in the fall, he supposed it made sense for her to have shopped already. After all, certain stores that depended on student traffic to drive their sales would be desperate for business and she probably would have found some excellent sales.

The uniform wasn't quite right, though, much like anything else Luna wore. The crisp white blouse, black vest with the Hogwarts crest - which would be replaced by a house patch after sorting - and knee-length black skirt were all perfectly normal, but instead of either the black tie of an unsorted student or a house color tie, hers was rainbow striped. It matched the rainbow striped knee-high toe socks she was wearing - where her shoes had disappeared to or if she'd even worn them to the game, Harry didn't want to know - adding a splash of color to the otherwise drab black and white uniform. Her butterbeer cork necklace rested against her collarbone atop the vest and Harry realized with a flash of guilt that he hadn't worn his since

returning from Daphne's house. "So, what do you think of my outfit, Harry? Next year is going to be ever so fun..."

This fell into the same category as 'does this outfit make me look fat', Harry knew, and he was loathe to stick his foot in his mouth. After struggling for a moment to come up with an appropriate answer, he settled upon something that he thought she'd accept. "It's... unique."

That summed up Luna herself pretty well too, come to think of it.

"Haaaarry!"

"Haaaarry!"

"Have we ever told you that you're our favorite seeker?"

Harry snickered as he marked his place in the History of Magic text he was perusing, lowering it to rest on the desk in front of him. "Don't let Charlie Weasley hear you say that. I hear he's working with dragons in Romania these days and he might bring something home with him when he comes to visit." Alicia snorted with laughter as she and Angelina settled into seats on the opposite side of the desk. "But anyways, what can I do for my two favorite non-Katie chasers today?"

Leaning forward, Angelina reached up to play with her red and gold hair. As per the terms of their bet, all three chasers had allowed Harry to turn their hair the same shade of red as his mother's with gold streaks for a week... and all three liked it so much that they were still wearing it a month later. Even Hermione had found her team spirit, allowing the girls to convince her that as the 'fourth chaser' she was a loser too and that she had to undergo the same change for at least a week. While she hadn't kept hers, she had allowed him to go one step further and charm her eyes green for a single Potions lesson. Snape's explosive reaction had been worth both the fifty points lost and having to explain the reason for the loss to his Angels. "Well, we've already taken the first year exams... and we really liked working with you to come up with and try out new plays for the Hufflepuff game..."

"Well I would hope you've taken the first year exams, ladies. You are third years after all." Angelina and Alicia looked a bit taken aback at his response and Harry sighed as he closed his book; clearly this

wasn't a quick 'hi and bye' visit from the girls. "What do you want and what exactly are you hoping to bribe me with?"

The two chasers exchanged looks and a few elbows before Alicia lost out and found herself in the role of the pair's spokesgirl. "Like Angelina said, working with you was a lot better than Oliver. We got more out of less time and it was a lot less stressful. Hermione mentioned you have a pitch at your house and so we were hoping that maybe you'd trade some time this summer for some help revising for your end of year exams?"

Chuckling, Harry leaned back in his seat and crossed his arms over his chest as he eyed the pair. "Dumbledore visited over Christmas hols to see if I wanted to be bumped up to Katie's classes for spring and summer terms. Do you really think I need help earning my way into second year?"

"...thank you, Hermione, for forgetting to tell us that key piece of information. Grr." Alicia nibbled on her lower lip for a moment before offering up her best puppy dog eyes. "So does that mean you won't help us out? I mean, even if you don't want to spend your summer drilling and having real practices, I'd settle for just coming over to fly. Angelina and I - and Katie for that matter - are all purebloods, but none of us have a good place to fly outside of school. A few of the pro teams open up their pitches when they're not using them but they charge a wand and a cauldron for the privilege of flying there, and we could go to the Weasleys but..." Alicia trailed off and exchanged a look with Angelina, both girls wincing at the thought. "We obviously like the twins and their older brother Charlie is pretty cool, but every time we go over to the Burrow, their mother tries to stuff us into aprons so we can start revising for our Housewife OWL. And don't even get me started on their little sister..."

Sighing, Harry debated what to do with the... trio, he assumed, even though Alicia had couched everything in terms of her and Angelina so far. Any summer flying, be it with or without him, would only benefit the team when they returned the next year. And having some other quidditch players around would give Jasmine some company, along with creating a buffer between his sister and Hermione when she inevitably came to visit. On the other hand, he really didn't particularly need help with anything academic. Or need anything at all, to be perfectly honest. Then his eyes drifted down to the textbook in front of him. History of Magic was one class that, even

the second time around, he probably wasn't going to be getting an Outstanding on. Binns was just that bloody dull. Unless... "How'd you two do on History of Magic in first year?"

Alicia shook her head. "I barely managed an Acceptable. So I don't think I can help you there. Got all Exceeds Expectations and Outstandings, except for that one class. Bloody goblin rebellions. How about you, Ang?"

"Same here." Angelina thought for a moment before perking up. "But Binns has a bunch of house elves who correct his exams for him and they write out the right answers so you know for future reference. None of the other professors do that because they're stuck doing it all themselves and can't be arsed. So if I owl home and get my mother to send me my exam... I bet it hasn't changed in the last few years. You'd be set. All my right answers plus the official right answers from the elves for the ones I missed."

Hmm. That wasn't horribly ethical. Then again, if Binns was too stupid to change his tests, was Harry really doing anything wrong? After all, he was just equalizing the unfair advantage that any student with an older sibling had. Just as he was opening his mouth to accept, though, Su decided to flop into the seat next to him and interject her opinion. "Harry Potter! Getting a copy of the test ahead of time is cheating! And... unless you share it with me, I'll be forced to tell Hermione and the others about your wrong and immoral actions. Especially Hermione."

Harry shuddered at the prospect. While this Hermione wasn't as much of a stickler for the rules as her other self had been, athletics and academics were two areas that she took very seriously and she likely wouldn't be amused by his grey area 'study guides'. "You drive a hard bargain, Su. Deal." He pointed at the chasers. "You two get me your tests from first year, and I'll owl my parents to see if they're willing to have you over. Who knows, maybe we can turn it into a day camp. Find another chaser or two and someone to guard the other set of rings, and you can play against each other. I'm pretty sure Applebee from the Hufflepuff team lives in the neighborhood; Tamsin is a pretty Cornish name. Or if all else fails, we can pool our knuts and put a classified ad in the Daily Prophet. See if anyone from St. David's, St. Andrew's, or St. George's wants to come out and play. Or hell, we're on the floo. Open it up to the Athenry

Academy, too. If we can find at least two more beaters and a seeker, we can get the Weasley Twins in on it and have two complete teams. Maybe we'll even be able to field three or four teams so we can rotate through 'on' and 'off' days."

"...wow. We just wanted to come over a few times and toss the quaffle around with you. If you want to organize a summer youth league, though, go for it. Pleasure doing business with you; I'll go write a letter home now." Angelina shook his hand, followed by Alicia, and then the pair rose from their chairs. "Again, wow. History of Magic for a summer full of quidditch. I almost feel bad; we definitely got the better end of that bad deal. I was half expecting him to try and sucker one or both of us into going to Hogsmeade with him in two years."

Harry snorted mentally. Even if he hadn't promised the Carrow twins, he wouldn't have gone down that particular road. He'd done some pretty stupid things over the years, but getting between the Weasley twins and the girls they liked was a bit too stupid even for his tastes...

"...Harry? Are you even paying attention? The others may be busy obsessing about the upcoming exams but if you're not even going to listen to what I'm saying, I can go talk to Jessica or Cho, or find something else to do other than standing here talking to myself."

Looking from Dumbledore to Su, Harry shook his head. "Just a second, Su." He turned away from his sputtering friend, focusing his attention on where Dumbledore and McGonagall were standing just outside the front doors of Hogwarts, chatting pleasantly. Reaching behind himself, the headmaster produced a broom and mounted it, lifting off gracefully and slowly picking up speed as he crossed the grounds in a southerly direction. South. Where London was. Where the Ministry of Magic was. "My God, I completely forgot. It's tonight."

Su's slim hand came up to tug on Harry's sleeve until he looked down into her curious violet eyes. "What's going on, Harry? What's tonight?"

His instinctive reaction was to reach for a lie, but then Harry remembered who he was talking to. Su was aware of his future knowledge; not only could he tell her the truth about what was coming, but he didn't need an excuse to cover why he knew it. On the other hand, while he'd shared that secret with Su back in January, he hadn't even thought to try his hand at leading the Angels around by their noses, 'uncovering' clue after clue with them so they could 'discover' the secrets of the forbidden third floor corridor for themselves. So while he could tell Su the truth, he had no way of explaining to Hermione - assuming she somehow ended up accompanying them to face Quirrell and Voldemort as she had in his dream - how he knew about the Philosopher's Stone, how he knew the headmaster was on a fool's errand, or how he knew what Quirrell was planning. "Tonight's the big night. With Dumbledore out of the castle, Voldemort will use Quirrell to make an attempt on the Stone."

"Oh. Bugger. Well, at least I've finally gotten the hang of those three spells you told me I'd need for tonight." Su's head slowly turned as she watched the headmaster disappear off into the distance before looking back up at Harry. "Well, seeing as how you're the one who's done this before, I think that means you're in charge. What do we do now?"

That was the question, wasn't it? If they went after the Philosopher's Stone now, they might be able to recover it before Quirrell arrived but they'd either be stuck waiting for hours after that for Voldemort's host to deign to join them or their Defense professor would turn back before reaching them and carry on serving as Voldemort's willing vessel. On the other hand, if they waited too long, Quirrell might actually prove himself competent in this world and secure the Stone. And that didn't even take into account Neville; had Dumbledore dropped all the necessary hints via Hagrid to put the Boy-Who-Lived on a collision course with his real mother's killer tonight?

Finally, Harry arrived at a decision and gestured for Su to follow him as he began heading for the school's large front doors. "Last time, I went to a professor and was told not to worry about it, then sat around the common room for a while before sneaking out to... well, do something about it. Let's skip the first part. I know about when we snuck out last time; if Neville and his merry band of idiots sneak out, we follow them but otherwise we wait until about the same time and then sneak out ourselves, sealing the portrait hole behind us. We go to the third floor corridor, force our way through the protections, kick Voldemort's butt, grab the Stone, and get a few hundred points for Gryffindor from the headmaster."

"Gotcha. Well when you put it like that, it sounds really easy. Maybe we can stop in the kitchens along the way and see if the elves will give us any snacks to eat while you get us through the protections around the Stone?" Harry shot Su an odd look at that, which prompted the Chinese girl to offer a defensive shrug. "What? You got past the Stone's protections as a first year the last time around, and You-Know-Who wasn't that much harder for you, was he? You're much more powerful now, so the whole thing's bound to be even easier for you. The only reason you're even thinking of bringing me with you is because you put too much stock in those stupid dreams of yours."

Harry scoffed as he pulled a tapestry aside and ushered Su through into a hidden passageway, guiding her up a narrow, winding stairwell that allowed them to bypass several flights of temperamental moving staircases in favor of emerging on the sixth floor near the Ancient Runes classroom. "You can mock my dreams all you want, Su, but they haven't been wrong yet. Why shouldn't I believe them?"

Groaning, Su leaned against the banister as they waited for the stairs to realign so they could ascend to the seventh floor. "Assuming you don't mess something up and get us both killed - or worse, expelled - I'm going to have you look up the term 'self-fulfilling prophecy' and write it out fifty times for me... with the definition."

A grunt escaped Harry as he tripped over a step, caught off guard by Su's use of a classic Hermione-ism. While she wasn't nearly as prolific as that American baseball player one of his Second War trainers had enjoyed quoting - and he still didn't quite get how people whose funerals he went to could come to his unless there were inferi involved - she did have the occasional gem and that was one of her best. Then Su's words sunk in and Harry frowned as he considered her assertion. It was the classic 'chicken and egg' paradox, essentially. Was he seeing the future or was he just seeing something that would end up coming true because he thought it was supposed to be the future and so he went out of his way to make it happen? Like Cassie attending Beauxbatons? Were his friends meant to join him tonight or was he dragging them into danger to fulfill the images seen in what might be ordinary - albeit frequently recurring - dreams? "Well, you can stay in the common room if you really want. No reason for you to risk yourself."

"Are you kidding me? Even if Dumbledore destroys it right after we give it back to him, we'll be the only ones in our entire generation to ever see the Philosopher's Stone. Touch it. There's no way I'm passing that up." Pausing in front of the Fat Lady, Su offered up the password before heading through the portrait hole, lowering her voice as they were greeted by the sounds of others in the common room. "Besides, when else am I going to get a chance to unleash the Breath of the Imperial Dragon without my tutors yelling at me the second I get more than a spark?"

Harry rolled his eyes at that. His primary backup was only interested in coming along so she could indulge her inner pyromaniac and the inner niffler she claimed she didn't have. Great. Well, it was still better than having someone like this world's Neville at his back. Speaking thereof... Harry shot a look over at where Neville, Seamus, and Larry were clustered around Anne Weasley, who was serving as podium for the book the trio was reading out of. He nodded in their direction and Su followed behind him obediently as he slowly looped around past them on the way to the area he and his Angels

normally occupied. While he couldn't get quite close enough to hear what they were talking about, the familiar red stone that featured prominently on the current page of the book Anne was holding said it all. "They know too. Looks like we're going to have to deal with them, then the protections, then Voldemort. Alright, if I were you? I'd think about heading upstairs to grab a quick nap before dinner. We didn't even head out until everyone was asleep last time, which is when we're leaving this time unless Neville does something to make us leave early. Long night."

It looked for a moment like Su was going to argue with him but then she nodded and turned away, heading for the stairs that led to the girls' dorms. Harry did likewise, only to have something occur to him, making him look back over his shoulder at the staircase Su was ascending. She could deride his dreams all she wanted, but tonight would prove him right once and for all. He hadn't said anything to Hermione yet or invited her along, and if he was up in his dorm taking a nap until just before the time they left, the chance was very small that he'd be able to. So if Hermione did somehow end up coming with them tonight, it would prove that his dreams were genuine oneiromancy and not just dreams that he turned into self-fulfilling prophecies, wouldn't it?

Harry continued to ponder that as he wandered up the stairs to his dorm, opening the door to find Megan stretched out on her stomach on Dean's bed, reading a book as her legs kicked slowly in the air. Dean himself was perched on the edge of Larry's bed with a sketchbook in one hand and a pencil in the other. Harry's chuckle made both of them look up at him and freeze, but he just waved them off. "We're not allowed in the girls' dorms but there's no rule against them being in ours, remember? You might want to be done before the Three Stooges come up here and find you, though. Bad enough that you're both 'mudbloods'; he'd probably make fun of you for drawing by hand with a pencil and not using some kind of fancy wizard invention that does all the work for you and requires absolutely no talent."

"What do you and Su have against him, anyways? I mean, it's pretty obvious that the house is split into thirds in our year: there's him and his friends, me and Megan, and you and your girls." Setting down his sketchbook and pencil, Dean ticked off the members of Harry's group on his fingers. "I know Hermione's beaten him up twice - probably for good reasons - and there was that stupidity in the

common room our first night here that had Daphne stunning him. But with you and Su... is it just loyalty to your friends or something else? Because you seemed pretty anti-Neville from the minute we got here."

Wandering over to his bed, Harry sat on the edge as he untied his trainers. "Well, part of it has to do with some issues between our families that go back about a decade. Then I got here and... you've seen him. He's a bully. I don't like bullies. Even if I hadn't made friends with Hermione and Daphne, we never would have been friends. Look on the bright side, though: having me and my friends to fight with keeps him from having time to pick on you two for being muggleborns." Looking down at himself, Harry gave a mental shrug; he was still in his uniform but a few simple charms would get it unwrinkled and looking fresh from the house elves in time for dinner. "But on that note... I'm going to nap until dinner. Try to keep the scratching of pencil on paper to a dull roar?"

Dean let out a chuckle at that as he went back to work and Harry flopped back onto his bed before flicking his wand to close the velvet curtains, adding a few extra charms to keep him from being disturbed if the pair did want to talk. Then, after casting a charm to wake him ten minutes before dinner began, Harry closed his eyes and cleared his mind.

Making it through dinner was much easier the second time around than the first for Harry, mostly because he knew he could and would succeed that evening. After all, he'd done it once already. On the other hand, proving that she probably shouldn't pursue a career as an unspeakable, the normally calm Su had been visibly more keyed up than usual during dinner, to the point that the others had noticed. Harry had blamed it on uncertainty over exam scores and if they hadn't believed it, they hadn't called him on it.

Now, in the ultimate moment of irony, Harry found himself sitting in the very chair where Neville had waited for him, Ron, and Hermione seven years and an alternate dimension ago. Fingering the note-turned-airplane in his lap, Harry watched and waited as the quartet made their final preparations before sneaking out the portrait hole and as soon as the Fat Lady's portrait swung shut behind them, he was on his feet and moving. Throwing the paper airplane in the direction of the girls' dorms, Harry drew his wand and added the charm needed to send it spiraling up the stairs to seek out Su in her

dorm. One very long minute later, two voices began to descend the stairs. One was the girl Harry had been expecting. The other was a girl who... Harry had also been expecting, if he was honest with himself. Su didn't look too pleased to have a companion and she was quick to try and explain away the muggleborn's presence. "Fine, she's here. But only because she caught me sneaking out and told me she'd go wake up a prefect if I tried to leave her behind."

"Coincidence or providence, Su?"

"Do you even know what either of those words mean?"

"If I wasn't using them the right way, would you be trying to change the topic?" Grinning as Su stuck out her tongue at him, Harry turned his attention to Hermione and used a quick charm to pull her hair back into a ponytail with a conjured scrunchy before transfiguring her pajamas into a black shirt and trousers. "Come on. It's adventure time."

Hermione managed to keep quiet as they trooped through the portrait hole and snuck down the corridor that led to the Grand Staircase. As they waited for the constantly shifting stairs to realign so they could descend to the third floor, though, her patience ran out. "Alright, time out. Even ignoring the transfiguration, charms, and freaking conjuring that you shouldn't be able to do yet, Harry... I wasn't actually expecting Su to agree when I told her she either had to bring me along or I'd go tell a prefect. Didn't even think she was actually sneaking out to be perfectly honest; she's too much of a goody-goody for that. But it's obviously you two actually are up to something, so I want an explanation and I want it yesterday!"

Then, before Harry could so much as think of how to explain what was going on - which he really should have done earlier, he realized - much less try to sell it to Hermione, a new voice spoke up from behind them. "Three of my firsties, out after curfew? I think I'd like that explanation too..."

Drawing his wand, Harry slowly turned to face the last person he wanted to see. If it had been any other prefect - from his house or one of the others - or even one of the professors, Harry wouldn't have felt the slightest bit of guilt about what he was going to do. Cherise, though... they were friends. Not on the same level as him and his Angels, but friends nonetheless. But if Harry had to choose

between Voldemort acquiring the Stone and having to beg for forgiveness later... "Reese? I just want to say three things. First of all, it's not what it looks like. Second of all, I am so, so sorry about this. And third... stupefy!" A jet of red light emerged from the tip of his wand and Cherise instinctively raised a shield to block it. Her shock at it shattering was still on her face as she crumpled to the ground.

"...you just attacked a prefect. Harry, what's going on? Are you trying to see if your parents have enough money and pull to get you out of being expelled or something?" Ignoring Hermione's questions, Harry quickly cast a Disillusionment Charm over each of them followed by a version of the Muffliato Charm that would follow them as they moved. That done, Harry brushed past Hermione as the stairs finally locked into place, eager to catch up with the quartet he could see drawing closer and closer to the third floor landing. He hated the idea of leaving Cherise just lying in the corridor, but knew that the professors would most likely find her in short order. If not, Dumbledore could send McGonagall to revive her after they retrieved the Stone. "Oh look, more magic you shouldn't know. Harry, time to start coughing up answers. Harry? Harry! Answer me!"

Except he couldn't answer. He had nothing to tell her other than the truth and... screw it, he decided. He'd just tell her the truth. She could choose to believe him or not and if she chose not to? He'd give her the entire length of the protective gauntlet to change her tune before deciding to either bring her with him to face Voldemort or send her back to 'go get help'. "You-Know-Who is possessing Quirrell. Dumbledore is hiding the Philosopher's Stone in the third floor corridor we're not supposed to go down. You-Know-Who tricked Dumbledore into leaving the castle tonight so he can go after the Stone. Instead of wasting time trying to convince the professors we might possibly know something they don't, Su and I decided to do something about it ourselves. This is us doing something."

One of the sets of footsteps behind him came to an abrupt halt and then Harry was treated to a low buzzing noise as Hermione dropped far enough back that he and Su ended up outside the bubble of her Muffliato Charm. Looking back over his shoulder, Harry eyed Hermione's wavery, disillusioned form as her mouth moved soundlessly. Then comprehension dawned and she rushed down the stairs towards him, the buzz fading as her bubble once again enveloped them. "Harry! You can't be... are you serious?"

Harry shot a hopeful look over at Su, who rolled her eyes before gesturing for him to proceed. "Of course I'm not Sirius. He's my godfather." Twisting to one side to avoid the inevitable punch, Harry chuckled. "Okay, fine, I am serious. Even if I'm not Sirius. And not only is all that true, Hermione, but Dumbledore spent the year dropping hints for his tarnished Golden Boy to follow, so right now Longbottom and his friends are about to walk into a trap thinking it's just Snape at the end of the line. Which means we have to do two things tonight: save Longbottom from himself and keep You-Know-Who from getting the Stone."

"...right then. I am going to want a proper explanation of all this as soon as we're done, though. How you knew about You-Know-Who and Quirrell and the Stone and Dumbledore and Longbottom and all." Hermione fell silent for the remainder of the trip, only speaking up again as they reached the third floor landing and began making their way towards the forbidden corridor. "So, what's the plan?"

To be honest, Harry had been expecting a bit more in the way of resistance from Hermione... but then he realized it was probably just being delayed until they sat down for that eventual explanation she'd demanded of him. Or maybe she was too curious about what was going on to fight him at the moment. Whatever the reason for her amenability, though, he certainly wasn't going to look a gift horse in the mouth. Peering around a corner, he held out one hand until Su ran into it, stalling his friends for the moment. Harry then stepped out of his hiding place, sending a quartet of silent stunners racing down the hall at where Longbottom and his minions were standing in the open doorway of Fluffy's room.

Silence reigned for a few seconds and then Harry abruptly realized how stupid his actions had been when Fluffy snarled and lunged forward, forcing Harry to summon the unconscious students to keep them from becoming a midnight snack for the cerberus. After canceling the charms he'd cast on himself to keep himself unheard and unseen, he did the same for the girls and then gestured for them to follow him as he strode down the hall towards Fluffy and his first confrontation with Voldemort... at least in this dimension. "Part one of the plan was saving Longbottom and the others from themselves. Did that. Now we plow our way through some ridiculously simple protections that I can't believe the professors

actually thought would stop a thief, confront You-Know-Who, and save the Stone."

Hermione pondered that for a moment before gesturing to Fluffy. "I hope your plan actually has more steps than that, because I don't fancy having to try and 'plow' through that thing."

He hadn't really thought about it, really; his two trains of thought had been to either stun the massive beast or put it down if necessary. Having to apologize to Hagrid was better than letting Voldemort gain the secret of immortality, after all. Now that he was forced to think about it, though, neither was really an option: chances were Fluffy would fall on the trapdoor and block their passage if stunned and the same was a risk if he killed the cerberus, to say nothing of the hell he'd catch from his companions for his actions. Then it hit him... how big of a threat would Fluffy be if Harry shrunk him back to the size he'd been in the picture Janae showed him, or perhaps even further? "Reducio." The innate magic of the cerberus fought him but in the end, he had more than enough power for the task and Fluffy found himself reduced to roughly the size of one of Marge Dursley's bulldogs. After looking around curiously, Fluffy took off down the corridor barking madly. Harry turned just in time to see Missus Norris yowl and disappear around the corner, Fluffy in hot pursuit. "Right then. If they haven't found Cherise yet, the professors are going to know we're here soon. Down the rabbit hole we go. Su, you're up first."

"Yay. Time to play with fire." Harry rolled his eyes as he lifted the trapdoor for Su; they'd definitely be talking about her emerging pyromaniacal tendencies before he let her anywhere near Potter Manor. Peering down into the blackness, Su drew her wand. "Huǒ!" A burst of brilliant, unnaturally red flames erupted from the tip of her wand, roaring downward and incinerating the Devil's Snare. Letting out a low whistle, Harry found himself comparing Su's ability to Hermione's in his original world. On one hand, Hermione's bluebell flames were an accomplishment because they produced heat and light without needing oxygen or fuel. On the other, Su could create fire capable of incinerating some of Professor Sprout's best Devil's Snare in one blast. "Harry? Please tell me that drop isn't as far as it seems?"

Well if she could use Hermione-isms on him, why not break a Ron-ism just to make the day complete? "Are you a witch or aren't you?"

Leaning over the edge, Harry drew a quick swirl in the air with his wand. "Spongify." A burst of purple light shot down into the hole, impacting the pit that had been hidden beneath the Devil's Snare and making the stone glow faintly for a moment as the Cushioning Charm took hold. "Ladies first."

Hermione snorted as she stepped up to the edge. "Yes, ladies first into the strange dark pit of the unknown that Su had to burn something out of before we could enter. You're a real gentleman, Harry." That didn't stop her from being the first one through the trapdoor, though, dropping feet first and landing with a grunt on the now-padded surface below. "Lumos." A ball of light appeared at the end of Hermione's wand and she waved it back and forth, inspecting her surroundings. "Charming."

"Yes, because you're such a posh and refined girl, Hermione. I'm sure whatever's down there must be simply dreadful for your complexion and your hair and..." Su trailed off as Hermione raised her free hand and offered a two-fingered salute. Letting out a snort, Su shook her head in amusement before jumping down the hole herself, landing in a crouch and slowly rising to her feet. "I don't know, Hermione, I kind of like it. Sure it's a dark and a little dank and the bare stone isn't really too homey, but the smell of torched plants really gives it that special something."

Rolling his eyes at the banter, Harry flicked his wand and slammed the door shut behind him, adding a few different security charms to delay any pursuit before casually walking over to the open trapdoor and jumping down to join the girls. Which was a much nicer experience when you didn't have a cerberus trying to bite your head off and then vines trying to strangle you to death, he mused. Landing on his feet, he looked back over his shoulder at the set of stairs leading up to somewhere - which he'd noticed last time too but never explored, assuming it was some way for the staff to circumvent having to deal with the Devil's Snare when they came to check on the Stone - before gesturing for the girls to follow him as he took off down the set of stairs opposite. "So we've gotten past Hagrid and Sprout's protections. That leaves Flitwick, McGonagall, Quirrell, and Snape. And the headmaster's at the end. Flitwick's is easy, he..."

Pushing open the door, Harry led his two companions into a small room that was home to nothing but a simple table with seven bottles

of various sizes and shapes standing on it in a line. As soon as Su crossed the threshold, Harry began counting; after two seconds, the expected purple flames sprang up behind them with the black fire blocking the doorway leading onward bursting to life exactly three seconds later. "Hmm. Stuff in bottles. Never would have guessed this was Snape's room."

Before he could explain what to do, though, Hermione stepped forward and grabbed the roll of parchment lying next to the bottles. Opening it, her mouth moved soundlessly as she read it to herself, eyes scanning the parchment from top to bottom twice before looking back up at Harry. "It's a logic puzzle. The perfect defense against most wizards; they haven't got an ounce of logic and would be stuck in here forever."

Harry nodded. "Snape's a half-blood, so he'd both know that and know how to take advantage of it." Leaning against the wall beside the doorway full of purple flames, Harry caught Su's eye before shaking his head. He already had the answer, yes, but letting Hermione figure it out would give her a way to contribute to the mission, much like how he'd let Su handle Sprout's protection. "So, Hermione, which one do we drink?"

"Well give me a minute, won't you?" Hermione read the parchment several more times, walking up and down the line of bottles as she muttered to herself softly. Finally, she grabbed the smallest bottle and lifted it high. "This will get us through the black flames. Except... there's only enough here for one of us, Harry. Maybe two if we take really small sips."

Harry took the bottle and examined it for a moment before passing it to Su. "Bottoms up." The diminutive Chinese girl nodded before knocking back the potion in the tiny bottle. Her skin took on an unnatural, bluish-white cast for a moment before returning to normal, and then Su was diving through the wall of black flames. Turning his attention back to Hermione, he raised his wand. "Do you trust me?"

Scoffing, Hermione gave him a gentle - for her - kick in the shin. "Considering where we are and why we're here, do you really need to ask that?"

...right then. The entire exchange was straight out of the dream he'd had shortly after returning to school, but Harry's plan to get

Hermione through the flames - and the battle to come - certainly wasn't. "Adamafors." White mist poured from the end of his wand, enveloping Hermione and seeping into her tanned skin. Peering down at herself curiously for a moment, Hermione raised an eyebrow but Harry knew the spell would take a second to take hold even for someone as powerful as him. After all, he was completely rebuilding one of the most complex things a wizard could ever attempt to work with: an entire human body. Then with the spell's characteristic crack, Hermione's body transformed into a glittering, vaguely whitish substance. Her clothes were still fabric and would burn away as she passed through the flames, but he could always conjure her some replacements when they were done and the transformation didn't leave her anatomically correct enough to let him see anything he shouldn't while she was in this state.

Not that he wanted to with a twelve-year-old girl.

He had, on the other hand, tried with Luna back in the day.

No luck.

As much fun as fighting in that form could be, Harry really couldn't afford the loss of magic that accompanied it nor did he have someone present to transfigure him. So, after casting a quick Flame-Freezing Charm on himself, Harry waved his hand in front of Hermione's face to get her attention before pointing at the black flames. "Through the flames now, stare at yourself later." Hermione shot him an indignant look and started to raise her hand, only to stop when Harry reached out and grabbed her wrist tightly. "Su can't hold off Quirrell - and You-Know-Who - forever. Staying or coming?"

Yanking her arm out of his grasp, Hermione whirled and charged towards the wall of black flames Su had disappeared through. Wand at the ready, Harry was right behind her, finding Su right where he'd told her to be: kneeling behind a rippling bronze shield that was ably soaking up the abuse that Quirrell was handing out. His arrival caught their professor's attention and the barrage of spells slackened and died as Quirrell stared at them with a mixture of curiosity, uncertainty, and annoyance. "Potter! I wondered who had led these two down here. What are you doing here? Where's the Longbottom boy and his friends?"

"They're a bit busy lying in the corridor upstairs. We stunned them on the way in. Sorry. You'll have to deal with us instead." Or at least the professor have to deal with him and Su; Harry wasn't sure how useful Hermione would be in the upcoming fight but at least in her current state, she wasn't a liability. And if things got really nasty... well, he knew plenty of ways to dispatch Quirrell in a hurry. Slipping into the sideways combat stance he'd come to prefer, Harry looked to his right. "Head for the mirror, Hermione. We'll cover you! Reducto!" Rolling away from the thick bolt of azure light with agility that would have surprised anyone who'd sat through one of the man's classes, Quirrell attempted to fire off a spell at Hermione's back as she ran, only to snarl and dodge to the side as Harry send a bolt of bright pink light racing towards him. Harry grinned and waggled the smoking tip of his wand reprovngly at the man, glad to have wheedled the secret of that particular spell out of Narcissa over Christmas hols, before following it up with one of his favorites. "Reiff trydan!"

"Hmmp." Quickly conjuring an iron rod, Quirrell slammed it into the floor in front of him, creating a ground that drew in the electricity and protected him from Harry's attack. "You don't seem surprised to see me, Potter. I was sure people would suspect Severus over me. After all, who would ever suspect p-p-poor st-stuttering P-Professor Quirrell over that vile black bat?" He countered with a series of relatively minor curses, seemingly more intent on testing Su's shield than genuinely causing them harm. "Although, in all honesty, I must say I am surprised to see you. Longbottom... him I could understand rushing down here to challenge me, what with how his parents and Dumbledore have filled his head with stories of his own supposed greatness. You, on the other hand... I've watched you. You may be more powerful than him, but you're smarter as well. You should know that interfering in the affairs of the Dark Lord is folly, Potter. You must have known that you would die at my hand, as would your friends. So why? Why did you come?"

After watching Quirrell casually deal with one of his favorite spells, Harry opted to switch to a mixed bag of stunners and other less powerful combat spells, more to keep the man busy than anything else as he pondered both a response and his next move. "Even if you were the Muggle Studies professor, you're still a pureblood and so I'm betting you wouldn't understand a joke about great power and great responsibility. And Riddle was a teenager back in the 1940s, so he wouldn't get it either. What about... hey Riddle, did

Dumbledore ever hit you with that one about making a choice between what is right and what is easy?"

Quirrell reached up towards his turban with his free hand, staring at Harry in shock before going rigid as a low hiss emerged from the back of his head. "You are either very brave or very foolish to use that name, boy. Knowing who your father is, I am inclined to think the latter..." Slowly unwinding his purple turban, Quirrell continued to stare at Harry until the length of fabric dropped to the floor to reveal his bald head. Then, in a major deviation from his old universe, there was a sickening crack as Quirrell's head abruptly turned a hundred and eighty degrees to reveal Voldemort's smirking visage. "Hello, Harry Potter."

... bugger. That definitely hadn't happened the last time. Sure, Voldemort had been giving the orders but he'd still only had to face what basically amounted to a slightly supercharged Quirrell's magical prowess. This... this was something else entirely. Not that Harry feared this fragment of Voldemort's soul playing parasite in another man's body, of course, but it did promise to make things a good deal more difficult for him. "Hello, Voldemort. I'd say 'fancy seeing you here' or something just as witty, except I actually was expecting you and so... why bother?"

"You know my true name, something not many can say. How?" Harry pantomimed zipping his lips and Voldemort snarled, raising Quirrell's wand. "So be it. Perhaps a bit of pain shall loosen your tongue. Crucio!" Rolling his eyes at the man's predictability, Harry shifted to one side and let the spell race past him as it pierced Su's barrier, the spell losing a bit of its speed and power as it hit the shield and caused a series of outward ripples but piercing it nonetheless. Really, didn't Voldemort know... right, this was the first time this Voldemort had met him apart from Halloween of 1991. He didn't know how Harry fought. And didn't seem inclined to learn, either. "Crucio! Crucio! Stand still, you irritating little boy! Crucio!"

As he continued dodging Voldemort's spells, Harry found himself reevaluating his plans. This... Quirrellmort... hybrid seemed weaker than the post-resurrection Voldemort he'd become accustomed to dealing with, but was definitely faster. And even a weaker Voldemort was still stronger than any Quirrell. This called for a change of plans. Thrusting his wand out, Harry jerked it upward and pulled the stone floor up into a barrier that would protect him and Su from a spell or

three. "Su, collapse your shield and start gathering power for You-Know-What." Looking back over his shoulder at the Mirror of Erised, he whistled to get their companion's attention. "Change of plans, Hermione! Forget the Stone for now; we'll retrieve it after we take care of Voldemort!"

Hermione looked from the mirror to him and back a few times uncertainly before nodding and rushing over to join them behind the transfigured barrier, arriving as Su waved her wand in a wide arc and collapsed her shield. There was a rushing noise accompanied by a burst of bright green light, and both girls flinched as the Killing Curse impacted, sending shards of stone flying away in every direction. Scowling, Hermione turned and punched Harry on the left shoulder. "This is not what I signed on for! You told me all I had to do was follow you through some stupid traps and then stare into a mirror for a bit! Not fight You-Know-Bloody-Who!"

"Yeah, well, I wasn't expecting him to turn Quirrell's head the hell around and start throwing Unforgivables!" And oww. Girl's punch was even nastier when she was made of diamond. Although that did give him an idea. After hastily adding an extra layer of protection to his crumbling barrier, Harry peered around the corner and fired off a random assortment of slightly stronger spells that - while not truly dark arts - would cause enough pain if they connected to stagger Voldemort and open a wider firing window for Harry. Alas, it wasn't to be. "Listen, you can sit this out if you want but then Su and I are probably leaving here in body bags. Assuming there's anything left by the time Dumbledore gets here. You're made of diamond; it's hard to control, torture, or kill a girl who's not alive at the moment. Which means that even if I didn't need Su for the next part of my plan, you make the best decoy. So what's it gonna be?"

Without warning, Harry found himself stuck between a rock and a hard girl as Hermione pressed herself against his back, peering out around the edge of the stone barrier to assess the situation. "Fine. But I'm moving in this summer so I can fly whenever I want, so Tara better clear out part of her room and get a bunk bed. And there will be no more mocking me for staring at your mum's arse. Or hugging her too long. Or other stupid things I may happen to do but most certainly are not signs I have a crush on her." She pulled back, allowing Harry to take a deep and very much needed breath, before eyeing him curiously. "So, got any ideas or should I just stand there and let him curse me a few times?"

Harry momentarily debated trying to argue her terms but seeing as how they were under attack by Voldemort at the moment and hiding behind a crumbling wall... "Su and I need twenty seconds. Thirty tops. Pretend he's Longbottom or Carrow and punch him a few times, tell jokes, run in circles around him to confuse him... I don't really care. But get out there, annoy him for thirty seconds, and then get the hell out of the way. Sound doable?"

"Sounds stupid, but since I've been following your crazy plans all damn night... what the hell?" Looking away, Hermione reached out to tap Su on the shoulder, waiting for the younger girl to turn and face her before leaning in to plant a quick kiss on Su's lips. Su remained motionless in shock for a moment before reaching up to wipe at her lips with the back of her free hand. She opened her mouth to demand an explanation only to be cut off by Hermione. "For luck."

"I don't need luck, I have skill."

"Who said it was for you?" Leaving Su to ponder that, Hermione dove out from behind the stone wall and ran towards Voldemort with a fierce war cry. Morbidly curious, Harry let the already damaged wall crumble into rubble so he could watch as he and Su prepared to put the next stage of their plan into action. A burst of brilliant green light erupted from Voldemort's wand and Harry sucked in a breath; he hadn't technically told a lie in that one couldn't kill what was already dead... but he'd never had a chance to test the diamond transfiguration as a defense against that particular curse in the past. Fortunately for Harry, the Killing Curse hit Hermione head on and then splintered, tiny bolts of green flying off in every which direction as it passed through her body. Then Hermione was on him, driving one fist into Voldemort's stomach and spinning as he fell past, setting up a double axe-handle punch that she delivered to his back to send him sprawling to the floor. "Hah! And my mother said that all those Saturdays spent watching Star Trek with my father were a waste of time!" Voldemort's response didn't come in the form of words: he merely grabbed her by one ankle as he surged to his feet before pivoting and hurling her into the nearest wall. Hermione impacted with a horrific crash but came bounding back out, fists flying like a barroom brawler.

As fascinating as the spectacle was, Harry knew he and Su were essentially sitting in the open and Hermione couldn't distract Voldemort forever. Turning to Su, he raised his wand. "Alright, I know we didn't practice the whole thing but you have your half down, right?" She nodded. "Okay. So just form the symbols and when you go to activate the spell, try not to freak when a second wand shows up."

Nodding, Su brought her wand up to rest against her chest and closed her eyes for a moment. Then the tip began to glow a brilliant red and her eyes shot back open as she began whipping it back and forth in front of herself in a series of tight, controlled motions, drawing a pair of glowing orangish-red hànzì in midair in front of them. Finishing her work, Su used a flick of her wand to rotate it to face Quirrell before stabbing her wand into the center of her creation. "Huǒ gōng!"

"Fiendfyre!"

"Holy shit!"

Harry ignored Hermione's outburst as the hànzì collapsed inward on itself, turning into a tiny, flickering ball of flame that seemed innocent enough until it burst into a torrent of fire with a roaring, billowing noise. Unlike the previous times he'd cast the spell, he could feel the cursed fire clawing and struggling against his mind like an Imperius victim fighting his control, but the sensation was muted and the spell's draw against his power reserves was far reduced. That had been the core of the plan he and Su had come up with: use her own affinity for fire magic to fuel a blaze that he would warp into fiendfyre and control.

Judging by the fierce Chinese Fireball racing towards a suddenly nervous-looking Voldemort... they'd succeeded rather handily on that front.

"Why the frown, Riddle? I could have sworn Dumbledore told you... death is the next great adventure!" After swirling the serpentine dragon around Voldemort's borrowed body so closely that Quirrell's purple robes began to smolder, Harry led the head high up into the air with his wand before reaching the top of the chamber and slashing his wand down. Releasing a bone-shaking roar, the dragon shot down and enveloped Voldemort whole, incinerating him. A few

seconds later, when no fragment of Voldemort's soul emerged, Harry nodded in satisfaction before reaching out with his mind and magic and shattering the spell he'd cast, the Chinese Fireball losing definition and collapsing into raging fire before Su too cut her end. "One down, sixty-three to go."

The room was deathly silent for moment and then Hermione rose from the corner she'd hidden herself away in during the last exchange of the battle, one side of her face and body slightly blackened and smoother than the rest of her diamond form. Putting her hands on her hips, she glared at the pair of them, foot tapping rapidly. "Okay, I think now is a perfectly good time to ask... what the fuck was that?"

Someone clearing their throat behind him had Harry whirling around to point his wand at a very familiar figure in purple robes as he melted out of the shadows. Dumbledore merely raised one eyebrow, looking from Harry to the scorched stone and back. "I dare say that is a question I would like answered myself, Mister Potter."

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